SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 408. FOR WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 24TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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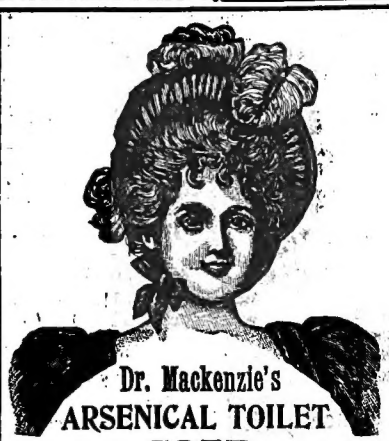

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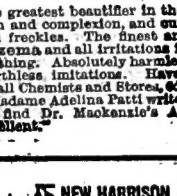

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Short Stories

EDITED BY ARTHUR PEARSON

No. 408.] For the Week ending October 24th, 1896. [1d.

The White Stone.

BETWEEN Odense and Middelfrat the Danish highway used to pass, years ago, through a wild but fertile region. In the parish of Vissenbjerg it entered an old forest of beech and oak, where the branches so roofed over the road that even in the brightest daylight the traveller found himself in the densest gloom. Deer would spring out through the ferns and raspberry vines, and blackbirds dart back and forth among the thick foliage.

For a few minutes at midday a single ray of sunlight found its way through the leaves, and cast a trembling glimmer upon the green moss which lined the wayside, but it would soon pass, and the road be as dark and gloomy as before.

The whole region, and especially this forest, stood in bad repute. No one cared to journey over the Vissenbjerg road at night. Travellers waited until morning, and then hurried through the forest in as large companies as possible.

Many were the stories of murder and assault and robbery which had taken place in there. Were these stories true or exaggerated? Who could say? But at any rate they were told, and the people believed them.

At one place the road wound round between two banks. In one of these banks it was said that the highwaymen had dug a cave where they lay in wait for victims. That no one might escape them a cord was stretched across the way, which sounded a bell in the cave when anyone passed.

Towards the village of Skalbjerg the forest became thinner; trees gave place to undergrowth; the landscape showed open fields and ploughed land, and was dotted here and there with cottages and farmhouses.

Of these latter, the largest and finest was that of Terkel Dam. He owned a large part of the Vissenbjerg forest, and had many cattle pasturing on its outskirts, tended by a young girl whose name was Karen.

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She was a little, insignificant person, was Karen, thin and ill-featured, and she was lame. When the other girls had driven home their cattle in the evening and had come together to sing their gay songs, Karen kept at a distance. She seldom spoke, and seemed to care little for the people around her. And they paid little attention to her.

Sometimes of a pleasant summer evening, when they heard a soft, mournful song sung out in the forest, the other girls stopped for a moment and listened. "It's the lame Karen singing," said one.

Then they went on again. She felt herself in some way inferior to other people, but her desires were few; she was contented, yet she always seemed sad; no one had ever seen her laugh.

"It all comes from the day when she fell from the rock and hurt her foot," said the grandmother. "God must have taken away all gladness from her then."

But Karen shook her head. Silence and timidity were her nature, and so she liked best to be by herself.

And yet Karen loved her master's son. She, the lowliest of all the servants, a poor lame creature, had dared to love a fine young fellow like Ebbe; Ebbe, who might have any girl he pleased. What presumption! what simple mindedness! In spring she brought him the first flowers that came forth after the snow had gone, in strawberry time a dish of the finest berries always stood by his plate. Ebbe ate them, the others laughed, and Karen said nothing.

One day, as she placed a dish of the fruit before him on the table and then went away, Terkel smiled and rubbed his hands, and looking over his shoulder, said:

"You two might make a couple. What think you, my son?"

Ebbe laughed.

"She's faithful and industrious, the little wench, but she limps so," and there the matter dropped.

That year there were rough times out in the forest. Several travellers were robbed, and there was much talk of a horse dealer, who had on his person a large sum of money, and who had not been seen from the time that he started off down the Vissenbjerg road. His friends

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had searched everywhere, and had sent men out into the forest, but in vain; they got no trace of the horse dealer.

One day a solitary rider approached the passage-way between the banks. Karen lay resting in the bushes not far away. She heard a bell tinkle and then saw three men with heavy cudgels in their hands rush out and cast the rider from his horse. In her excitement she ran hurriedly to the village and told all that she had seen.

An alarm was given. The sheriff's deputy gathered together all the strong men of the parish and hastened down the road. They succeeded in capturing two men who had just finished burying the murdered horseman among the bushes. They were two soldiers, recruiters, who for some time had been making trouble and disturbances wherever they had showed themselves in the country round about. The third robber had escaped.

The deputy took Karen to his office. She stood trembling and clutching the folds of her dress as he closely questioned her, having first commanded her, in the name of God, to tell the whole truth as to what she had witnessed. But she knew nothing more than she had told at first.

"You are sure that there were three men?" Yes, she was sure.

"And you were with your cattle out there by the clearing?"

"I had been there since early in the morning."

"Now tell me the names of all those whom you had seen go by."

She did so. Among them was an old man who had been collecting brushwood by the road. He, too, was summoned and made to name those whom he had seen go by. They were all brought to the deputy, who went from one to the other, with the girl and old man. He remained standing for a moment before each, and asked:

"Was this the other robber?"

Karen shook her head each time he questioned. At length they stood before her own master, the rich Terkel Dam; he was among those whom the brush gatherer had seen pass, and he had been summoned with the rest. Terkel stood and rattled the cover of his pipe. "Look sharp now and see if you can recognise me," he said with a laugh. But again Karen shook her head, and there was nothing more that the deputy could do.

The two soldiers were afterwards tried and sentenced. They were to be taken out to the hill behind the church and there executed.

The morning that they were carried through the village Karen stood among the others to watch the executioner's waggon pass. On the way, one of the robbers reached down and picked up a great white stone. This he cast in the direction of Terkel Dam's farm gate, calling out so loudly that all could hear:

"By this remember that when my white stone becomes black he shall get his due, who sits there grinning at us."

Soon after, when they had come to the hill and he lay with his bare neck upon the block, he laughed and called to the executioner:

"Slash carefully with your sword, you wretch, so that you get no nick in it! You'll certainly want to use it again for the murder on the Vissenbjerg road."

"When will that be?" questioned the judge.

"When the little wench there is no longer afraid to tell what she knows," he answered.

The sentence was carried out and the people talked about the affair for many a day; but no one could imagine what the poor rascal had in mind when he cast the white stone towards Terkel's farm.

At Michaelmas Karen was dismissed from service. There was so much talk about her, and the people of the parish charged her with trying to deceive and vex them by claiming that there were three robbers, when in reality there could only have been two.

The afternoon that she should go away she stood crying, in front of the house, a little bundle of clothes under her arm. Ebbe carried out to her a roll of frieze.

"You shall have this for your faithful service," he said.

"May I kiss your hand for thanks?" she begged.

"Where do you think of going?"

"That I don't know, and I don't care much if only I may find another herd of cattle to watch and another forest to hide myself in."

"Why do you care so much about staying here?"

"Because here I can see you," she answered without lifting her eyes.

"You have brought it all upon yourself," he said, "by speaking falsely in regard to the robbers; you said that there were three when there were only two."

Karen stood silent awhile; then, "I will tell you how it was; I couldn't name the third because it was—your own father."

The farmer's son turned pale.

"Let's go into the house," he said, taking Karen by the hand.

It was a little while before supper time; the men had not yet come in from their work. Terkel sat alone in the room. He stared at his son and asked why they came together.

"We have news for you," said Ebbe. "Karen and I are betrothed."

"In that case there will be two to go away," said Terkel; "you'll not live here with me, understand."

"Now wait, will you, and let me tell you how you owe it to her that you are sitting here in this room at the present moment."

"What do you mean?"

"She did see who the third robber was, down in the Vissenbjerg road, but she wouldn't tell his name."

Terkel shrunk back; he fell heavily against the wall, but after a few minutes he lifted himself up and said in a broken voice:

"Let everything be as you wish, and now you will take the farm and manage it and the household."

From that evening Terkel left everything to the young couple. He would feed and watch the fowls out in the barnyard, but this was about all he did, and he said little.

Every day he went and looked at the white stone by the farm gate, and he would never let it be removed.

"I think that it's becoming black, oh, so black!" said he, looking round to see if anyone was watching. Then he would wash the dust and mud from the stone, making it white again. And every evening, just before bedtime, Karen would take down the hymn-book and read from it to the old man.

The next summer, when the committee went round from farm to farm, begging pieces of brass and copper for the new church bell, they came in turn to Terkel. He stood and bethought himself.

"Why should you go begging at every house?" said he. "I will give it all."

He went into his bed-room and brought out a great

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bag of money which should be used in purchasing the new bell. The men broke out into exclamations of gratitude and praise for Terkel, but he had turned to see if Karen had witnessed what he did.

Accompanying the committee were the choir boys from the charity school, in white gowns, who stood before each house and sang a verse of some hymn. Before Terkel's they sang a whole hymn. He was deeply moved at his own generosity, but still he noticed that they sang the hymn all through.

"They only gave my neighbour one verse. I got four. However, that was a lot of money that I gave for the bell."

Karen stood with her hand in his. She kissed his hand and said:

"Father! Father! I believe that God has heard the prayer that I've been praying so long. Now you're certainly upon the right way."

"I must hasten to go that way," said he, "and you have helped me, oh, so much!"

That evening she filled the whole house with song, and after the lights had been put out and they were gone to bed Ebbe took her hand in his and said:

"I don't understand. What a great change has taken place in you! And you are more beautiful than I have ever seen you before."

"But yet I limp," she answered.

So time passed on. There came good and bad years. Karen did her duty and was a blessing to everyone. She was a good, pious, sensible woman, who helped her neighbours, shared what she had with the poor, and went every Sunday, no matter what the weather was, up to the Vissenbjerg church.

"That's a household pleasing to the Lord," declared the pastor, and so thought everyone. Terkel continued to pay his visits to the white stone; and when he thought that no one was looking he would clean it with great care.

But he was growing old; once a corpulent man, he had now become thin; he was bowed over; and it was with great difficulty that he could climb up the stairs to his chamber.

One evening he came in looking very happy.

"To-day they have finished hanging the new bell up in the church. Every time that it swings now it will ring out to God for me."

From the beginning of early spring he had to keep to his bed. When the leaves began to turn yellow and fall he whispered to himself:

"I've lain here and watched the swallows out of my window a whole summer through; a last summer, I think."

Karen nursed him and scarcely left his bedside.

One summer day as she came in with a bowl of gruel he lay gasping for breath and could scarcely speak so that one could understand him.

"The white stone out there will soon become black," he was mumbling. Karen bent down over him; she spoke gently, but no one could have heard what she said. At first the old man shook his head; then he shut his eyes and could not answer. She made him fold his hands while she sang softly a hymn of which he was very fond. Then suddenly she burst into tears, lifting his arms around her neck, and whispered:

"May I? Say yes, oh! say yes!"

He shook his head; but she begged again, more earnestly than before, and knelt down by the bed, no letting go his hand.

"You shall not speak about it again," he gasped. "I said no, and it must be as I said."

She sat there discouraged, with bowed head. Out of doors the wind was blowing the leaves from the trees and whirling them about in great flocks. Terkel looked up. Karen sat at the foot of the bed, her hands folded over the hymnbook.

"Talk to me a little," he whispered; "you sit there so silent and never say a word."

"You won't listen to what I say."

"Yes, I will, but you want what can't be. How does it concern the people what took place down there on the Vissenbjerg road? I must confess my sins before the Lord will forgive me, you say, but I'll lose the respect and esteem of the whole parish. What will people say when I come out among them again? for I can live a little while longer, I should think."

She did not answer; the tears were trickling down her cheeks.

"Are you angry?" he asked after a few moments. "Talk to me; I can't bear that you should sit there and not speak,"—but she interrupted him. "Must it be so? In God's name do what is right, what is best!"

A long time passed before he laid his fumbling hand on her head and said: "It shall be as you wish; it shall be so." She gave a cry of joy, ran out of the room and directed that a messenger be sent at once to the village for the pastor; she herself would follow with the waggon to fetch him.

It became evening, and it was late and dark before they returned. In the chamber there three great candles had been lit before Terkel's bed. He lay, twisting his thumbs and talking to himself, without regarding what went on about him. Once he opened his eyes, looked round and whispered:

"Let someone be sent to the church—I want the new bell rung—my bell. Listen! now it's ringing to God for me—He can hear it, can God—it's for me—for me alone—for I bought it! Will she come soon with the man?"

It was just about bedtime when the dogs began to bark and the waggon rolled into the farmyard. Karen followed the pastor up into Terkel's chamber. Ebbe would have accompanied them, but she pushed him gently back.

What took place there in the sick man's room no human being besides those three ever knew. The people outside heard a voice which was slow and solemn, and one which was soft and pleading, and then they could distinguish whimpering and sobbing sounds. Afterwards it became still, and it seemed as though there was no life in there—and, indeed, death was present.

"How is he now?" questioned Ebbe, as Karen at length opened the door to let the parson out.

"He's better now than he's been for a long time," answered the pastor, "for now he's dead, gone to sleep in God's name. A great sinner lies in there; but the one who has wished him well and watched and prayed and delivered a soul from the error of its ways, that one is Karen, your good wife; blessed shall she be therefore in the sight of God and men!"

The stone out by the farm gate lay there for many a year. Every spring, at Whitsuntide, they gave it a coat of white wash and took good care that it was always white and free from spots.

R. T. Mumby.

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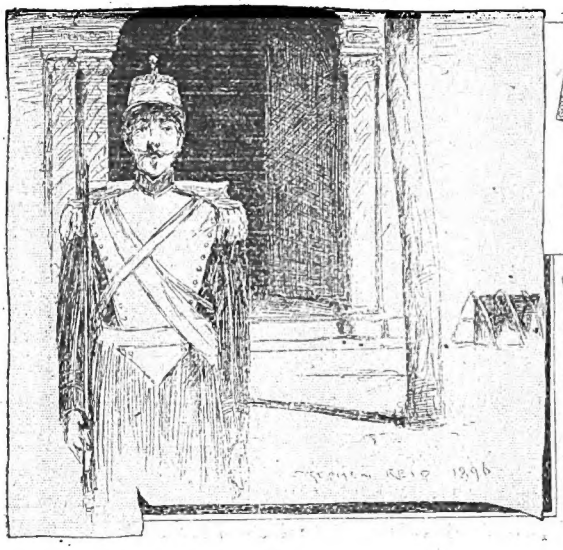

A COURT-MARTIAL

A HUGE grey building in a straight street on the other side of the Garonne. Wondering urchins stop before the high door, surmounted by a flag, which is guarded day and night by a melancholy sentinel. It is always a curious spectacle—soldiers coming, or going, or drilling. The wide court, planted with sickly trees, suggests more the thought of a prison than of a barrack.

On this June afternoon, especially, a great sadness seemed to rest on the sun-baked walls. The soldiers wandered back and forth in silent groups, and from time to time cast glances up at the grated first floor window, behind which the court-martial was assembled.

Ten minutes before, the Colonel, president of the council, had appeared in the high stone casement, and a shudder still ran through all these men at the thought of the apparition; not one of them but had trembled before this human image of military justice.

But the accused, who was about to be judged up there, was not so very great a criminal after all. His crime was a week's desertion in time of peace. They all knew he would get off with half-a-year's imprisonment, but still they were sorry, as every man in his company liked Joseph Brinquant, a gay, good-humoured, witty Montaubian.

The council-hall opened into the court on one side, and on the other into an immense garden. Formerly, the enormous building was the convent of the Abbés of Montauriol; there was still something monastical about the high walls, and the great Christ carved in yellow wood took on, in the semi-darkness, the aspect of an implacable judge.

The members of the council were seated round an oblong, green-covered table. In the centre was Colonel Vigier, between two commanders-in-chief; then came a captain, a lieutenant and a non-commissioned officer. On the side for the defence was a lawyer from the Toulouse bar, and for this occasion Captain Mainjean was fulfilling the duties of prosecutor.

As for the accused himself, he was scarcely visible. Poor Joseph Brinquant was huddled together on his seat, as though to hide from the others' gaze; and short, nervous spasms contracted his pale face, while his eyes wandered from Captain Mainjean to Colonel Vigier with an expression of poignant anguish.

Very dissimilar were the three actors in this drama of military life. The Colonel was a red-haired Colossus, in epaulettes. His face, tanned and hardened by the campaigns of twenty-five years and a life in the open air, would have been forbidding but for the kind, gentle, peaceful look in the blue eyes. Captain Mainjean, on the contrary, was quite the type of the modern officer. His delicately-shaped head, grey eyes, and yellow hair gave him a somewhat effeminate appearance, but his sensitive nostrils and nervous mouth denoted ambition and a strong will. With folded arms he waited, and Joseph Brinquant, a dark, spare, wiry southerner, found the suspense that weighed upon him almost unendurable.

At last the Colonel said:

"It is for Captain Mainjean to speak."

Captain Mainjean rose and commenced:

"Gentlemen, I will briefly state the facts which bring before this tribunal Joseph Brinquant, born at Montauban, the 8th October, 1869; at present a private soldier.

"The accused has been in the service sixteen months; his record is excellent. All that I find against him is twenty-four hours in guard-house for a slight offence. His chiefs and comrades all declare that up to last month Brinquant was always exact in his duties, and of a merry and sociable mood. His father, a well-to-do farmer in Capeville, makes him a liberal allowance, and Brinquant has always shown himself generous to a fault; so he could honourably and happily have served out his term if he had not allowed himself to be overcome by the most unfortunate of passions.

"It was recently noticed that Brinquant, usually so laughing and communicative, was becoming gloomy and morose. He avoided mingling with his comrades. They thought he must be ill, but to all their friendly inquiries he gave evasive replies. At last, one evening, he asked for and obtained leave of absence for the night, and the next morning he was marked absent at roll-call.

"Brinquant had disappeared.

"Chance soon put the captain commanding the first company on the deserter's track. An old clothes dealer in Toulouse, one Emile Badin, of Sainte Sever Street, declared that the previous evening a private of the regiment had presented himself at his shop. It was Brinquant, who came to exchange his uniform for citizen's clothes. Badin had no idea he was lending himself to anything more serious than a love-adventure. Brinquant, he argued, was free for the day and would be

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sure to return for his military effects at night. But seeing that his customer did not reappear, the man became frightened, and dreading inculpation in some unpleasant affair, he went at once to the captain of the first company and made a deposition of the facts.

"After that it was easy to trace the fugitive. A railway official recognised Brinquant from the description he had received of him. In the night, a traveller, accompanied by a woman, had purchased two first-class tickets to Narbonne. The employé noticed this man particularly, on account of the strangeness of his demeanour; his sharp speech and brusque movements betrayed some inward, nervous fear. One of the station officials exclaimed, as he saw the woman:

"'Why, look! It is Concepçion running off with a lover.'"

Captain Mainjean paused here for a moment. The accused drew a long, heavy sigh.

"At Narbonne," continued the Captain, "it was learned that the fugitives had gone in the direction of Port-Bon, but at the Spanish frontier all traces of them were lost. In the extradition treaty which exists between France and Spain the case of desertion from the army is not provided for, so that at this point military authority was disarmed.

"None thought ever to see Joseph Brinquant again, when, one morning, he came to this place and constituted himself prisoner. He frankly avowed his misdeed: for love of a music-hall singer he had not hesitated to dishonour himself by flight to a foreign land. Hardly was he out of France, though, when remorse took possession of this man who had, for a moment, been blinded by passion. He could realise what it would be to be condemned to exile—the most cruel of all exiles. For many long years, until lapse of time should bring impunity, he could not return to his native land. For long years he must shun his compatriots, must blush before them and hang his head in shame when they talked of France. Better submit at once to whatever punishment he had incurred; that is why Joseph Brinquant came of his own free will to await this court-martial before which he appears to-day.

"Perhaps, you will think, gentlemen, that a repentance so prompt deserves indulgence. I beg of you to resist this movement, and hope that you will not be tempted to mitigate the punishment that is due to this man. I urge the full enforcement of the law against him as a deserter. Especially at this present time should the military code be inflexible. When the army is on the eve of the most redoubtable events, it should be maintained, from high to low, in absolute fidelity to the flag. Every man to-day is a soldier and every soldier a citizen. He must acquire in the service a habit of discipline, of obedience, of devotion. It is too easy, in truth, to excuse a fault by attributing it to blind passion. Altogether too prevalent is the habit of making light of this sort of crime.

"Now, in this case, I ask you to make an example without allowing yourselves to be influenced by the excellence of the prisoner's antecedents. He followed the woman he loved, you will urge. But what a woman she was; the police-records before you are enough to enlighten you on that point. He returned and constituted himself prisoner of his own accord? Can you be sure of what motives he obeyed in doing so? The woman drove him from her, or, perhaps, Brinquant's family, in shame at his conduct, refused any longer to meet his needs. You must not overlook the fact that there are times when pity would be culpable; to excuse is to encourage it. Now that all are constrained to military service it would be strange, indeed, if this deserter were to escape full punishment under the pretext that he yielded to his passion for a creature unworthy of his love!"

Captain Mainjean continued.

The members of the council had listened to Captain Mainjean in the most profound silence. Some among them were astonished at the implacable severity of his words. He was known in the regiment for an excellent officer, conscientious, industrious and prompt in his duty, but all thought him kind and compassionate to human failings.

Why, then, should he suddenly show himself so pitiless towards this poor private? Certainly this peasant's son, mad with love for a music-hall singer, did not seem so utterly unworthy of pardon.

The prisoner's counsel was about to begin to speak, when Captain Mainjean raised his hand, and in a voice somewhat altered by emotion, said:

"I beg the council to accord me a few minutes' more attention."

The Colonel inclined his head in assent, and Captain Mainjean continued

"Gentlemen, it is by a very fortuitous circumstance that I am performing the functions of public prosecutor to-day; our respected comrade, M. de Beaupré, being, unfortunately, indisposed, it has fallen to me to replace him.

"I have given you my opinion as to the merits of this case. I now request your permission to relate to you an analogous one; when you have heard, your conscience will decide."

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There was a slight murmur here. The Captain had apparently finished his speech; what more could he have to add? And it was strange, but Captain Mainjean was no longer the same man; he had turned very pale, and he spoke as though he were labouring under repressed emotion.

The accused alone appeared entirely unmoved by external things, and was as though crushed by the prosecutor's words. His head buried in his hands, he was motionless, except for an occasional shiver that ran through his frame.

"Ten years ago," went on Captain Mainjean, "the sixty-fifth was garrisoned at Bayonne. One fine day, the annual graduation of officers at Saint-Cyr brought to the garrison a gay young second-lieutenant—altogether too gay, he was, and fond of life—who lost no time in making himself the talk of the town by his escapades.

"One evening, a little more harebrained than usual, the lieutenant induced several of his comrades to accompany him to a music-hall in Thiers Street. A little singer was appearing there who was all the rage at that time—one of those Moorish types so common on the Spanish frontier. The lieutenant and his friends applauded wildly, and threw the girl flowers and bonbons, to the intense disapproval of the peaceable citizens who filled the hall. So that there was nothing at all surprising to the officers in the lieutenant leaving them at the end of the performance with the words:

"'I am going to make her acquaintance, gentlemen.'

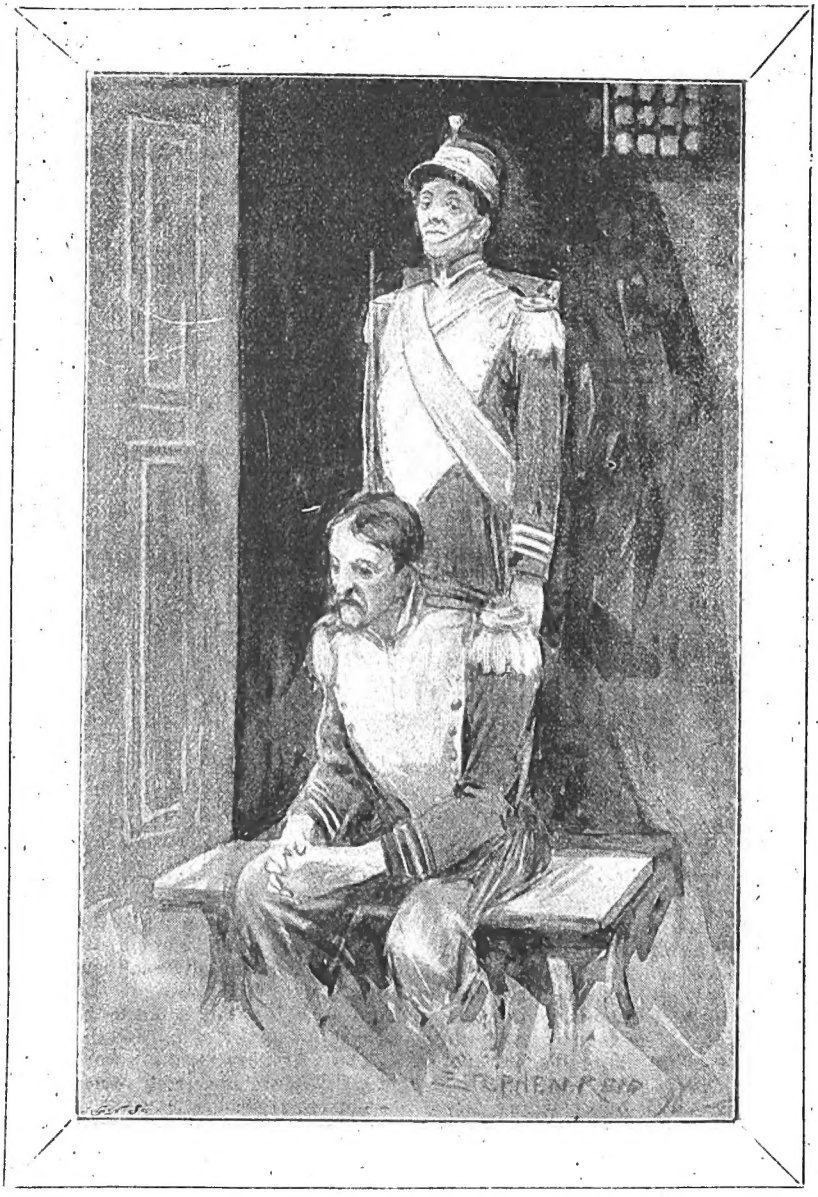
"But more than surprise, actual dismay was felt, when this caprice of a night turned out to be a serious affair. The lieutenant was now never absent from the singer's side; together they were everywhere to be seen—at the theatre, the races, in the street, at Biarritz. Things went so far that the captain of the company summoned the young man to him and paternally remonstrated with him.

"You must know, gentlemen, that this reckless young fellow belonged to a family of soldiers. His father, a former cavalry colonel, possessed nothing in the world but his pension and the thousand francs his Commander's Cross brought him: his brother was sailing the China seas as lieutenant in the navy, while he——"

Here came a short pause. Captain Mainjean spoke now with the greatest difficulty.

"The captain said all he could; it was in vain. But yet, with it all, the young lieutenant was not at heart a bad fellow. He was simply blinded by love for this woman, as Joseph Brinquant, the deserter, was for another. He believed implicitly in this Navarrese girl as Joseph Brinquant believed in Concepçion.

"I will be brief; it is terribly painful for me to recall these memories. What was to be expected happened.



The accused alone appeared entirely unmoved by external things.

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The lieutenant, fresh from Saint-Cyr though he was, deserted shamefully, just as private Brinquant did. He crossed the frontier and followed the girl to Vittoria. You know what would have to follow; at the end of a week to be marked absent without leave, then written down a deserter, then the court-martial, condemnation, and the rest.

"Ah! what a noble man that captain was! He had guessed it all. Without a word to anyone he got on the train for Spain. And when he found the runaway, there were no long speeches, or recriminations; he just spoke tenderly to the young man of his father who would die of shame, of the brother who would be forced to tear the nobly-earned stripes from his arms, of his whole honourable family given over to a future of disgrace. As he listened to his chief the lieutenant bowed his head lower and lower—at last he burst into tears, and with those tears went forth from him all his guilty thoughts, his unhallowed infatuation; with those tears was extinguished all his wretched love. He came back humbly, docilely, ready to do anything to make amends for his fault.

"Ah! I assure you, his heart has ever since cherished a sincere worship for the simple, brave man who drew him back from that abyss! Gentlemen, you all know the captain I have been speaking of; he is a colonel now, and sits opposite me to-day as president of this court-martial!"

Loud murmurs burst forth. Colonel Vigier's face was ashy pale, and he pulled continually at his long moustache, stammering huskily:

"Captain! Captain!"

But soon silence was restored. A deep emotion fell over these men, all familiar with danger, and hardened by war and life's trials as they were.

Captain Mainjean then proudly raised his head, and warmly, energetically, continued:

"Gentlemen, I have invoked the full severity of the law against the deserter, Joseph Brinquant; that was my duty.

"I now make an appeal for your clemency in his case; that is my right. I, myself, am the lieutenant of Bayonne. Like the prisoner I passed the frontier; only which of us two is the guiltier, if you please? I, son and brother of soldiers, fresh from the military training of Saint-Cyr, never having had examples of aught but patriotism and loyalty before me in my life; or this simple child of the soil, a farmer's son, scarcely able to read or write, whose idea of country is narrowed down to that corner of earth on which the village church steeple rears itself? Judge with your conscience, but decide with your heart, for if the accused be guilty, what then am I?"

After a few seconds' deliberation the council rendered a verdict of acquittal.

ALBERT DELPIT.

** HAVE YOU **

FORGOTTEN ANYTHING?

Memory is a treacherous thing, and it is safer to make a note of those little trifles which go towards making life pleasant.

Jot this down in your Diary:

MONDAY..... To call at 17 and 18, Henrietta Street for the patterns I promised to purchase for the wife.

TUESDAY..... To look in at the newsagent's for the current "HOME NOTES" and "HOME COOKERY" published to-day. Must set aside a 1d. for each of them. "S.S." for myself.

WEDNESDAY. Have promised to get home in time for dinner; the wife having promised to try a few new dishes from the cookery paper bought yesterday.

THURSDAY.... Intend to dine at the club. The wife's busy making the children new frocks from "FASHIONS FOR CHILDREN." By-the-bye, to-day's the 15th of the month, must put 1½d. in my waistcoat pocket to remind me to buy the new Number for her.

FRIDAY..... Will be able to buy "P.W." on my way home to-night. Another 1d.

SATURDAY..... Am paid to-day. Have promised to take home "MELODY" and "PEARSON'S MAGAZINE." I make it a rule to spend 1s. on my wife in some little present every Saturday. What better than these?

SUNDAY..... A quiet smoke and a chance of reading "P.W." and "SHORT STORIES" in peace.

AND

HERE AM I,

A WELL READ MAN, WITH A GOOD WIFE, A WELL-MANAGED HOUSEHOLD AND PRETTILY DRESSED CHILDREN. ALL FOR 1s. 7d.

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 17.

ON pages 527 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *October 26th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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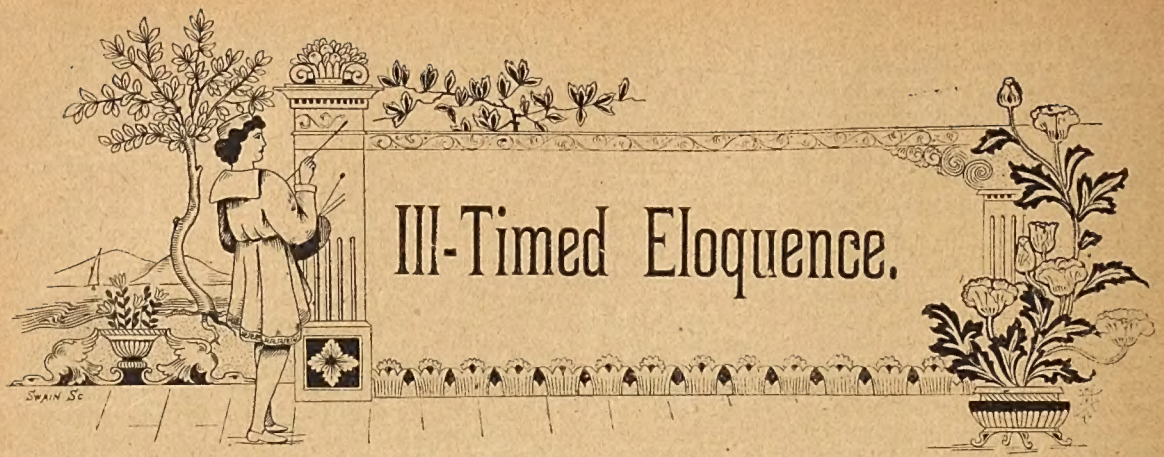

Ill-Timed Eloquence.

Place aux dames, so let me introduce Miss Delia O'Donnell to you first.

She was distinctly Irish, as brogue, cognomen and her abundant "gift of the gab" all combined to testify. Needless to say she was pretty, with cheeks like damask roses, dark brown hair and sparkling eyes. She was very small in face, form, and feature, and had a piping, though shrill, little voice, like a bird's.

He, Cyril Crowther, was distinctly English, with fair hair and blue eyes, and the somewhat vacant expression that is occasionally to be seen on the face of the gilded youth of the nation that considers itself the savouring of the earth.

They met in London at a crowded dance. They had neither of them been having a very good time; she was a stranger and knew few people, and he always looked upon parties as martyrdom, for he was afflicted with a painful stammer.

He had tried to make conversation with girl after girl and the only result had been signal failure. He had given it up as a bad job and had determined upon an early departure when he found himself near Miss Delia O'Donnell and could not resist asking to be introduced to her.

"M—m—m—may——" he began in trepidation.

"The pleasure of the next dance?" she briskly interrupted him. "Oh, certainly, I shall be delighted. Is not the floor splendid? Felt bound, you see, to plunge upon the well worn topic! Not as well worn in this case, though, as might be, far too covered with non-dancing dowagers who most decidedly have worn very badly, and who, 'pon me honour, admit of no room for plunging. Do you know the hostess? I have never set eyes on her. When I arrived, the daughter was the only one available to shake hands with. Quaint affairs, these large London dances! Either the hosts seem too good for their guests, or the company seem above their entertainers. Ah! ye don't know what hospitality is over here, like we do in Paddy-land. Sure, I never told you I come from Ireland. Fenian troubles over there? Ah! now, what do you take us for? We are not always in danger of our skins! What an amusing idea! Just like you English people!"

Mr. Cyril Crowther was delighted. He whirled her off amongst the dancers, never having needed to say a single word, and yet possessed of the pleasing sensation that he had been conversing volubly.

Dance after dance found the two partners, and Cyril Crowther never enjoyed himself better. He only needed to gulp forth a disjointed word and Miss O'Donnell would seize upon it, regard it as a brilliant thought and dilate on it for minutes without ceasing.

"She need never discover the fact of my stammering," thought Crowther, with enchantment.

There was only one thing which would have been counted a drawback by most people, the idea hit upon by Miss O'Donnell was invariably quite opposed in meaning to the remark he had struggled to bring forth.

"Never mind," Crowther took comfort, "she gives me credit for much sharper sayings than I should ever manage to give utterance to."

When the dance all too soon was over, he found himself to be of the very decided opinion that he had never met so charming a young woman as Miss O'Donnell before.

With a contented sigh he reflected that she had spoken of going to Lady Crushaway's reception the following afternoon. He would be able to see her there. But the day after, alas! she had told him she was returning to Ireland, so when could he hope to meet her again, especially as his leave was at an end and his passage booked by the next P. and O. steamer for India.

"Gather the roses while ye may!" Old Time was literally flying, but Mr. Crowther had to content himself by merely gazing at those that bloomed on Delia's cheek the next afternoon at the reception. He was as taken with her as ever. She talked on as rapidly as possible, and her listener did not even trouble to intersperse her conversation with his solitary stuttering words.

One idea took possession of him—this gay, vivacious little creature would surely prove to a stammering man a paragon of a wife. But though his thoughts were filled with this subject it was not till some hours after the reception that he managed to make up his mind. Yes, he had no doubt of it, he loved her distractedly and life would be unbearable unless she consented to become his wife. But how to put the question to her—that was the first and most important problem to be solved. He did not know where she was staying, so could not venture to call on her next day, and she left by the night mail for Ireland. There was nothing for it but to put in an appearance at Euston in the evening and lay open his heart to her there.

Cyril Crowther spent an almost sleepless night. Would Miss O'Donnell be alone at the station or would some tiresome individual come to see her off? And what should he say to her? She had a habit of guessing at his words, but then as she usually hit upon

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a totally wrong meaning, this time it would be necessary for him to speak fully and to speak out. Stammering would surely desert him at that last momentous moment. love would give wings to his halting words, and in fervid eloquence all his hopes and longings would be breathed forth! He tossed about in bed rehearsing his proposal. "Delia, I love you ardently, will you be mine? You are an angel and I dare not aspire to your affection, I only trust that in your gentle pity you will bend graciously to me and install yourself my sovereign, Delia, my Queen!"

His fervour almost brought the moisture to his eyes, and soon after he fell into a short, troubled sleep.

Two hours before the train left he might have been seen wandering round Euston, while the time crept wearily by. But at last, after interminable waiting, he found it was going only too fast. Twenty minutes was all that remained of it, and Miss O'Donnell was not there yet. A quarter of an hour and still she did not come. Ten minutes he paced frantically up and down. Nine, eight, seven — A hansom drove up and a lady sprang out.

"You here, Mr. Crowther? This is most charming. Going on by a later train? Porter, porter, here; these two boxes. Engaged, you say? Sure, you look as though ye should have been married as well years and years ago. Ah! now, Mr. Crowther, don't trouble about my things, ah, now, don't. Kingston boat? Yes, of course, that is the one I am crossing by. Oh! you did not mean that, ye meant——"

Cyril looked at the clock in desperation. Less than five minutes now, and no chance of a word till boxes were labelled, ticket and seat taken. He tried to transact the business with haste, but nothing could prevent Miss O'Donnell from lavishing words upon everyone. She was at last safe in the carriage, but seemed as though she were going to continue into eternity a one-sided conversation with the porter. Despair lent the anguished lover boldness. He swept the unoffending official aside, at the same time thrusting a florin into his hand. Now or never was the moment. "I love you," were to be his first words.

"Er—er—I——"

"Oh! do you really often travel down this line? I know nothing of it, nothing in fact of England. It is a more wooded country than Ireland, but I would not exchange my Emerald Island for any other land in the world for all that."

As she rippled on in her light, chirping tones it occurred to Crowther that he was really wasting time. It would be quite sufficient in the stress of the moment to say, "Will you be my wife?"

"W—w—ill——"

"Really, now! I *am* distressed to hear it. 'Pon me word! the first thing that struck me this evening was how seedy you were looking. I shall sympathise with you still more deeply in a few hours when I shall be bitterly paying the price of gallivanting. I need hardly, I suppose, enter into further explanation; but I'm blessed if England ever sees me over again. I don't know which are worse, the odorous steamers or the screeching trains, in which I am always in terror of my life of being crushed to smithereens!"

In her volley, Cyril Crowther's "you" and "be" were quite unheard. Miss O'Donnell only paused in time for him to give proud utterance to "my wife."

"Your wife? Ah! now ye don't mean to tell me that you're married, and you looking such a boy! But you naughty London men are all alike. Sure, and it's my heart ye might have broken, sinner. What right had you, a married man, to have danced with me all one night?"

Beads of perspiration broke forth on Cyril's brow. The guard was taking a final promenade up the platform, the carriage doors were all securely shut, in another instant the whistle would be sounding and the train be off. That she could at that last moment so cruelly misjudge him seemed all too hard. The whistle rang out.

"D—D—Delia!" he cried.

"An' it's Delia you'd be calling me!" for once having heard what he really meant. "No, sir, I am not accustomed to such liberties from married men."

He must write and explain; it was his only chance. But he did not know her address, and what means were there for him to find it out.

"Ad—dress," he shouted, pursuing at full speed the retreating train.

"Your wife's address? No, thank you, I don't want it. Good-bye."

The train was gone! With it went his hopes of the morning. "Love's sweet young dream," that was to have illumined his life.

"Chap looks a bit green, poor fellow!" was the porter's comment as he staggered slowly off.

* * * * *

He is toiling beneath the suns of India now, I have no doubt, and from all accounts Delia O'Donnell has missed a chance, for she has never married and does not seem likely to, though whether this fact lies in a scarcity of male population in the vicinity of her Irish home, or is caused by her masculine compatriots desiring wives who would allow them a word in edgeways, I have never been able to find out. One picture alone rises before me—their meeting once again when world-worn and grey headed. She, as talkative as ever, having kept in practice by conversing to the pigs and cows. He, quite cured of stammering, with his old timidity replaced by the determination that is said to be an attribute of the British race. A buxom matron is at his side followed by a bevy of bashful youths and blushing maidens. He steps aside, and leaving them grasps Delia by the hand.

"Thirty years ago I was *not* married, Miss O'Donnell, and I tried to make you a proposal, but you never gave me time!"

SEREN DIVA

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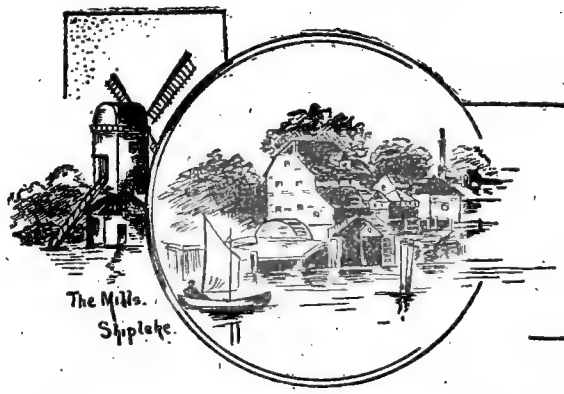

THE TWO FINGERS.

At the extremity of a little country town at no great distance from Tours, on the high coach-road from Paris to Bordeaux, there stood, about thirty years ago, a pretty wayside inn, with white walls and a swinging sign bearing the effigy of *Le Grand Roi*, otherwise Henry IV.

It was during a November evening, in the year 1818, when the wind was sighing and surging without, and the rain splashing down with uncompromising resolution, that the worthy landlord of *Le Grand Roi*, the honest, but somewhat imperious M. Ebrard, his three children, and one of his neighbours, who had taken shelter from the inclemency of the weather at his comfortable hearth, were seated round an enormous fire of pine logs, talking over the local gossip, and enjoying themselves as those only can do who feel a sensation of security from the inflictions of such a storm.

"Just hear the rain!" exclaimed M. Ebrard, after an instant, during which all the party had been silenced by a louder and wilder blast than any by which it had been preceded. "This is the third day that it has been pouring down, without a prospect of any change for the better."

Suddenly as he was talking two distinct blows were heard on the house door, given apparently with the handle of a riding-whip. The men removed their pipes from their mouths and listened.

"Who on earth can this be?" exclaimed the landlord, "it can't be a traveller, unless the diligence is behind its time; and besides——"

Again two loud knocks echoed through the kitchen; and M. Ebrard, somewhat reluctantly, took up the lamp, and then, without attempting to open it, he demanded, in a harsh impatient voice, who was there?

"A traveller," was the reply; "are you going to keep me in the rain for another hour?"

"What do you want?" was the next interrogation.

"What do I want? Why, some supper and a bed, of course, if I am not quite drowned before you let me in."

"There, there, don't be angry, monsieur, whoever you are," grumbled the host. As he spoke he drew back the ponderous bolt and raised his lamp to a level with the stranger's face. The investigation apparently terminated satisfactorily, for his manner changed at once; he bowed respectfully, shouldered a trunk which stood upon the threshold, reclosed the door, and preceded the new-comer into the kitchen.

A fine-looking young man threw off his large wrapping cloak, which was dripping with mud or rain, made one bound towards the blazing fire, and seated himself upon the bench, saying in a clear, joyous voice as he did so: "This is charming, this is delicious, mine host! Had you expected me I could not have wished a pleasanter welcome. And now I must ask you to hasten my supper, for I want to get off by the *patache* to Monsett to-morrow at daybreak; I should like to go to bed as early as I can."

"All will be ready in ten minutes," said Ebrard. "But you will excuse me if I venture to remind you that you might have gone on there by the diligence, as it passes through the town, instead of stopping here only to start again at dawn."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the stranger; "you are either very curious or very timid, monsieur *mon hôte*, for you have not as yet got rid of your distrust. In order to tranquillise you, therefore, I will explain this much. My family reside in a country house at a short distance from the town, and by continuing my journey in the diligence I should have arrived in the middle of the night—an arrangement I was particularly anxious to avoid; whereas, by taking the boat at six o'clock to-morrow morning, I shall reach home by dinner-time. Have I now succeeded in satisfying you as to my honesty of purpose?"

"Oh, monsieur!" was the somewhat embarrassed reply of the landlord as he met the sly smile of the young man; "you have quite misunderstood me. One look into your frank and handsome face was enough."

The supper was soon served, and in less than twenty minutes had disappeared; and then the worthy landlord lit a candle and conducted his guest to his chamber.

M. le Sous-Lieutenant Adolphe de Rosval hastily divested himself of his clothes, and, without extinguishing his light, threw himself on his bed.

In the meanwhile, a second traveller had taken up his rest at *Le Grand Roi*. He was a man of between forty and fifty years of age, tall and powerful, with broad shoulders and ample chest; his grizzled hair was brushed low upon his forehead, and there was a sinister expression in his eyes; but his features were well formed, and his manner self-possessed and easy.

"I imagine," he said, when the greetings with his host were over, "that I must be your only *pratique* to-night, for the weather will have kept all comfort-loving people under their own roofs."

"Pardon me, monsieur," was the reply; "the room next to your own is already occupied by a young man who arrived little more than an hour ago; but there is no fear that he will disturb you, for he appears to be a perfect gentleman, and is moreover so tired, and so anxious to get on, that he leaves us at daybreak to-morrow."

The brow of the stranger darkened, and he made no reply.

"Be careful," he said, a few minutes afterwards,

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"to call me in the morning at seven o'clock, for I must be at Tours by midday. Ah! by-the-bye, I shall require a saddle horse—let one be ready for me, as my time is precious."

Saying which the new comer ascended the stairs to his room.

Adolphe was, as we have stated, already in bed, with the candle still burning upon his table. He had, as yet, been unable to sleep; his brain was too busy. His newly-acquired rank and the anticipated meeting with his parents and his sisters had made him wakeful; so that when he heard the heavy tread of a man's foot traversing the passage, and passing the door of his room, he was conscious of every sound. Suddenly a thought struck him; and springing to the floor, he took a key from his waistcoat pocket, opened his trunk, and seizing his uniform sword, which lay upon the top, placed it under his pillow.

Midnight struck from the old clock in the kitchen, and all was profoundly silent in the house, but still Adolphe remained sleepless; when suddenly he was startled by a sound, which appeared to him like that of a key slowly turned in the lock. He listened attentively; but as it was not repeated, he concluded that he had been the sport of his own over-excited nerves, and drawing the bedclothes closer about him, he determined to profit by the few hours which were left, and endeavour to obtain some rest.

He had scarcely begun to sleep, however, when he was a second time disturbed, and on this occasion, he was at once convinced that he had made no mistake. Someone was endeavouring to enter his room. The candle had burnt out; but grasping his sword, he noiselessly groped his way to the door, and stood motionless beside it. About five minutes afterwards, the noise ceased, and he began to hope that the would-be intruder had abandoned all hope of invading his privacy, whatever might have been his motive for seeking to do so. He had carefully locked the door of his room, and had little fear that the fastening could be forced; but accidentally casting his eyes on the floor, he saw by the light of the moon which gleamed full upon the windows of his room, and which, rendered more vivid by its contrast from the subsided storm, was pouring out its chastened radiance from a now cloudless sky, that a hand has been introduced between the boards of his chamber and the bottom of the door, and was seeking to lift it from its hinges.

This was too much; and steadily raising his sword above his head, he struck downwards with all his force upon the hand thus traitorously employed. A smothered groan fell upon his ear, and a sound of stealthy steps retreating along the passage, and ere long all was still—but two bleeding figures remained on the floor!

Adolphe rushed to the fire-place; a few warm fragments of wood enabled him to light a second candle which stood upon the chimney-piece, and he then proceeded to examine the hideous trophy of his victory. For a moment he shrank from touching the first "fleshing" of his maiden-sword, but he rapidly overcame the weakness, and picking up the severed fingers, he carefully washed away the blood, and folded them up in his handkerchief.

"On the honour of a *sous-lieutenant*," he murmured to himself, "that was a lucky stroke, and really for a robber, the fingers are passably slender, and the nails tolerably clean. Well, I suppose that all is over for to-night; so, as I am shivering with cold, I had better go to my bed again."

Adolphe was young and fearless; and in a quarter of an hour he was sound asleep.

Day was breaking when the landlord awoke our hero, who accepted with considerable satisfaction a cup of excellent coffee. As he did so he instinctively glanced at the hands of M. Ebrard, and had no sooner ascertained that they were intact than he began to relate to him his nocturnal adventure, and to point to the blood upon the floor of the chamber and to the ghastly parcel on the chair.

The honest landlord turned ashy white as he listened, and clung to the arm of Adolphe for support; but he had no sooner rallied than he rushed towards the room of his elder guest. The door was open, he drew back the curtains of the bed and found it empty; traces of blood were distinguishable in the direction of the window, which was also open; he looked out; the heavy impress of a man's foot was visible on the soft soil of the garden which abutted on the high road; and thus M. Ebrard, excited as he was, soon convinced himself that the mutilated robber could be no other than the stately traveller who had honoured his poor house on the preceding night.

His indignation and horror were extreme; and he had no sooner seen Adolphe depart than he hurried off to acquaint the police with what had occurred; not forgetting to relieve his mind by the way by communicating to every acquaintance whom he met the particulars of the tragedy which had desecrated the hitherto respectable auberge of *Le Grand Roi*.

Adolphe de Rosval reached his home about midday; as he was not expected, and accompanied his first greetings with the welcome intelligence of his new honours, his appearance was hailed with the most vehement joy. His fond mother wept as she held him to her heart, and his sisters clung to him with mingled tenderness and pride.

"Only think, mamma, he is an officer already! Is it not charming? What will papa say?"

"But where is my father?" asked the young man—"*his* welcome is still wanting."

"You know he is often from home," said Madame de Rosval; "and we are as little as ever in his confidence. He left us three days ago, but we expect him home to-day."

"And is he still as low-spirited and silent as when I saw him last?" inquired Adolphe.

"Unfortunately, yes," replied the gentle matron. "I fear that he has involved himself in speculation beyond our means; and that the idea of having compromised the future welfare of his children presses heavily upon him; but your unlooked-for return, Adolphe, and your happy tidings will, I trust, restore him to cheerfulness."

As soon as the family circle had become somewhat composed, and that one person was at length permitted to speak at a time, Adolphe was overwhelmed with questions, every member of the party being anxious to learn all that he had done since their last parting.

"It is at all events, a blessing," said his mother, as she fondly passed her hand over his hair, "that you have performed your journey without any accident, my son, however monotonous you may have found it."

"Nay, *ma bonne mère*," smiled Adolphe, "it was not altogether so monotonous as you may imagine; for I at least met with one adventure strange enough to bear telling."

"An adventure, and a strange one?" exclaimed his sisters simultaneously; "oh, Adolphe, let us hear it."

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He complied with their request, and no cheek around him grew paler than his own as he recalled the extraordinary event of the previous night.

"And, by the way," he added, when he had brought his narrative to a close, "I must not forget to tell you that I carried away with me the undeniable proofs of my victory—here they are," and as he spoke he drew a handkerchief from his pocket in which something was evidently folded.

At that very instant the door of the room opened, and a man entered, large in stature, but pale and weak, and with his clothes saturated with rain. He could scarcely stagger to a chair before he sank down like one whose vital powers were utterly exhausted; and in a moment the whole family were crowded about him.

"My father! my dear father!" exclaimed Adolphe; "weary as you evidently are, how thankful I am that you have returned. I have news for you that will, I know, be welcome."

As he spoke the young man extended his hand, but the action met with no response; and as he glanced towards that which was so strangely withheld, he remarked that it was enveloped in a bloodstained linen.

"What!" he asked anxiously, "are you suffering from more than fatigue? Have you been wounded?"

"Yes," was the faint reply; "as I was coming through the forest, four leagues from this, I was attacked by brigands. I had heard that they were in the neighbourhood, but I believed it to be an idle rumour. I endeavoured to defend myself; and in the fray one of the ruffians struck off two of my fingers. I am faint from loss of blood; give me wine, and I shall soon be better."

Madame de Rosval hurried to the sideboard, and with a trembling hand and swimming eyes brought the required refreshment, while the two elder girls wound their arms about their father's neck, and wept piteously. Adolphe stood motionless, like one in a frightful dream; but little Rosalie, the pet and plaything of the family, too young to comprehend the sorrow on which she looked, and full of curiosity to see what her soldier brother had really brought home, busied herself in unfolding the handkerchief which had fallen from his hand on the entrance of his father, and she had no sooner succeeded than, clapping her chubby hands in childish delight, she called out, almost breathlessly:

"Mamma! Mamma! Adolphe has got the two fingers he cut off at the inn; give them to poor papa, and then he will be quite well again."

* * * * *

In another hour M. de Rosval was in the hands of justice. The landlord of *Le Grand Roi* had been so active in his exertions to redeem the honour of his house, that the gendarmes had tracked the culprit by the traces of his blood; and in the extremity of their anguish his family had forgotten to urge upon him a second flight.

On the 20th of December, the assize court of Tours was filled to overflowing. The event was one productive of unusual excitement; the idle and unfeeling were on the tip-toe of expectation; a drama of real life, and involving real suffering, was to be conducted before their very eyes. A father was about to be tried for the attempted murder of his son; and, moreover, the prisoner was no common criminal, but a man of old and honoured family. No wonder that the whole city was convulsed with curiosity and animation!

The court had assembled; the prisoner was ushered to his seat; the jury was duly sworn, and the proceedings commenced.

Pale, agitated, and painfully excited, Adolphe de Rosval replied to the summons of the *greffier*, and prepared to give his evidence. He was closely wrapped in a large military cloak, but raised his right hand steadily, and repeated the oath in a clear and audible voice.

"What is your name?" demanded the President.

"Adolphe Ernest Leon de Rosval."

"Your profession?"

"Pupil of St. Cyr; sub-lieutenant of the — regiment of the line."

"Your age?"

"Nineteen."

Then followed the whole detail of the nocturnal attempt upon his life; or, as he persisted in believing it to be, upon his property; but he was, as a necessary consequence of his position throughout the adventure, unable to establish the identity of the culprit. Not once had he ventured to turn his eyes towards the *banc d'infamie* on which his wretched father was seated between two gendarmes; and the President, touched by the painfulness of his position, gave him permission to withdraw.

Jean Antoine Ebrard, the landlord of *Le Grand Roi*, was the next witness to be called. He had died suddenly of heart disease three weeks before.

The circumstantial evidence against M. de Rosval was overwhelming, but still failed to establish the identity of the culprit. The evidence of the landlord or his stepdaughter must have condemned him; but the one was dead, and the other had positively sworn that she had never seen him before.

After the counsel for the prosecution (*procureur du roi*) had addressed the court, the counsel for the prisoner made an able speech, in which he strenuously endeavoured to prove an *alibi*. He stated that it was impossible to prove that the prisoner at the bar had slept at the auberge of *Le Grand Roi* on the night of the mysterious event which had led to the present trial. "No, gentlemen of the jury," he concluded, "the accused has been a victim, not an assassin. That he has been mutilated by violence is certain; but he has explained, in the clearest manner, the cause of this unfortunate coincidence; and the sword of the son is unstained by the father's blood."

"To prove which fact," exclaimed a hollow and almost inarticulate voice from amidst the crowd in the body of the court, "there are the fingers which I cut off under the door of my room." And as Adolphe ceased speaking, an officer of the court laid them upon the desk of the President.

Having silently examined them, an expression of astonishment was visible upon the countenance of the learned judge, who handed them to the *procureur* by whom they were in turn transferred to the jury-box. It was at once perceived that the severed fingers thus produced in evidence had belonged to the left hand, while M. de Rosval was mutilated in the right!

Three days subsequently Adolphe had ceased to live. Mortification had supervened upon the frightful wound which he had inflicted upon himself in order to save the life of his father, and to preserve the honour of his family.

The young soldier's career was over; his dream of fame had gone down with him to the grave.

Maggie Pardoe.

Google

In a Spirit of Fun.

"WHY do you always write love stories?" said the man irritably, fidgeting in his swivel chair.

"Because," said the girl with a sigh, "there's nothing else in the world to write about, and I have had *some* experience."

"Stuff and nonsense! The people who principally read such things are raw girls and boys, and sentimental spinsters. Look here, Miss Saville, I'd like to help you. You've got the right stuff in you, and you look as if you didn't mind hard work. What you write is readable, and moreover, full of promise; but there it stops. You spoil yourself with mawkish sentiment. You do, indeed."

"Then you *have* read some of the work I sent you?" she replied demurely, looking at him from under her long lashes.

"Oh, yes; though I never clearly understood *why* you came to send to such a paper as ours. That first story you sent me—er—'The Protoplasmic Atom'—took my fancy immensely. The idea was novel; the science from a problematical point of view was really soundly suggestive, and opened up quite a field of speculative thought. The first two chapters were *most* interesting, but the rest! You gave a whole page up to the psychological study of a kiss. After that, I turned to the end, and found it matrimonial, not scientific, so I returned your MS. immediately with a very fair offer, which you chose to disregard."

"Because it wasn't possible for me to accept. You told me if I left out the loving-making and re-wrote all the latter part up to the standard of the first, you'd take it. But, as I explained, this was impossible. The scientific part was only the atmosphere, the love-making was the real creative germ."

"You'll be wiser when you're older, Miss Saville. But at present I plainly see, like the rest of your sex, 'tis of no earthly use trying to convince you against your will. I thought that by making an appointment to see you, and giving you my personal advice, I might be putting you in the right way and doing you a good turn. Very sorry to find that you won't listen to me now that you've come. And please, may I ask you, as a favour, not to send any more stories of this type into our office; it's only wasting your time, not to speak of mine. The *Modern Argus* is a scientific and political paper for men and women of the world, not a young ladies' weekly, full of sentiment and complexion recipes. I'm rather surprised, Miss Saville, that you don't suggest writing us a fashion column!"

"Your circulation would be immensely improved if I did," she laughed, seemingly in no way offended by his brusqueness.

He looked at her keenly from under his spectacles, and she as keenly looked back at him.

His face was rather handsome in a thoughtful, intellectual way—not young, perhaps, and yet not old.

She was very pale, and her great grey eyes had a heavy, tired look. Under the edge of her broad brimmed hat shone a tangle of untidy, copper-coloured hair. When her expression was reposeful she looked sad, weary, and worn; when she smiled, a transformation took place. She might have been any age between twenty and thirty.

"I am wondering how old you are?" he said, inwardly wondering a great many other things as well.

"To a man of science a woman's age should be immaterial," said Miss Saville decidedly. "Ah, Mr. Signett, I've an odd feeling that you'll ask me to contribute to the *Modern Argus* some day. I feel like the boy in the gallery who vowed to play Hamlet. But—honestly, now—are you sure that you can't help me, with all my faults? I am almost discouraged for want of success."

"Positively sure. And—honestly, now—on my part, Miss Saville, do you suppose that professional, scientific or political men really care to read love stories?"

The colour came into her face, and she rose from her chair with a jerk.

"Do I suppose that the world is round, Mr. Signett? Why, the key of every life is to be found in that incessant, craving appetite, to be fed on love; which, after all, is only another name for Nature, and another name for heaven or hell! And of this one universal impulse every man gives different expressions. *You* love your work, you think, and devote yourself wholly to it, because that work is the present expression love wears for you. It may some day change to a child's voice, or even a woman's face; but as long as you're on this plane you must give love to something: and you must needs go on putting out all that is in you in your endeavour to receive it.

"You profess yourself a devotee of science! Well, science and its many laws change, slowly but surely, from century to century; what is accepted as true in one era is discarded in another. But the motive that propels it remains—and the motive of all real science is the love of one's kind. For, believe me, there never yet was a love story acted or written but what left its mark upon the world, and it is as real to us to-day as it was in the farthest yesterday."

She stopped abruptly, as if ashamed of having been betrayed into saying so much. Her eyes were no longer languid, but full of wrath and feeling.

The sneer had gradually died away from Mr. Signett's firm lips, for she seemed to have flashed into beauty all at once in her excitement. Nonsense she might be talking, but nonsense from a pretty woman's mouth is often wondrous persuasive.

"Are you making a study of the affections?" he asked awkwardly, feeling somewhat like a moth in front of a chloroform bottle.

"I'm not a love-sick school-girl, if that's what you mean," she answered, reddening visibly, as if she wished to imply that she was not in love with him. "I'm just a poor scribbler, trying to earn my own bread-and-butter in the teeth of adversity. Good-morning, Mr. Signett—and thank you for—your kind advice."

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Gathering up her drabbled skirts in her left hand, she bowed herself out of the office, and for at least ten minutes the editor of the *Modern Argus* sat glued to his chair in a brown study.

Although he personally objected to her stories he did not forget to look out for her name, and found much of her work in some of the smaller and worst paying journals. She was as prolific as she was clever, and her pen not quite so outrageous as her tongue. So though he often skimmed through her tales with irritation, it was never without interest; an interest that deepened as the days went on.

Gradually, as her name became better known, people began to talk about her. She was a prominent member of one of the "New Women" Clubs, and her little oddities and eccentricities were much commented on.

Often sharp sayings of hers about men were quoted, and it was astonishing how her views of his sex hurt him. Oftener sharp and hard things were said of her, and, oddly enough, this hurt him still more.

He even went out of his way to take up the cudgels in her defence.

"Why do you trouble?" she asked him point blank in the street one day, tales of his chivalry on her behalf having come to her ears.

"I care more than you may think," he said shamefacedly. "Have you no father or brother, or anyone to stick up for you? You're too young and pretty to face the world alone."

She was, as usual, untidily dressed; but her grey eyes were wonderful; her careless, vivid hair shone like a glory round her head; and her pale, tired face had an immensity of charm, born of the knowledge of the hearts of men.

"Won't you let me be your friend? I'm an awkward old bachelor; but——"

"There's nothing in common between us, Mr. Signett—no sympathy, I mean."

"Perhaps there might be more than you imagine."

"Well—perhaps. But you musn't give me any more good advice. I don't want it, and"—foolishly—"I don't care what people say."

Miss Saville might be called a truly unlucky woman. More than once or twice she had been on the point of making a brilliant marriage, but the men had died or disappeared, and her career was a series of unfinished romances. If she had made friends, the same fate pursued her till she lost them. In her literary work people were always expecting her to do something great, but it never came to pass. Her life—so full of promises—had no fulfilment. She was sadly unsuccessful, therefore scandal was rife about her. In the East they would have said she had the evil eye.

Sometimes she looked very pretty, and sometimes utterly plain; but her charm never failed her.

"To have hair that colour, not dyed, was unnatural," said the blonde women.

Mr. Signett often wondered what made her so attractive, but he never came to any definite conclusions.

About this time, after steadily overworking himself for some months, he fell a victim to influenza, and had it in its most virulent form.

He was naturally a very robust kind of creature, and the confinement to the house, the inertia, and the depression of spirits, usually so attendant on this malady, made a different man of him.

As soon as ever he began to mend, he wrote to Miss Saville, saying:

"Will you come and see me? I have found out that you can do me more good than all my physic. I've had so many lonely nights and days of self-contemplation lately—more than I ever had time for in my busy life before—and I am beginning to know myself, and to understand this new-old science of human love, which, according to your philosophy (and mine now), is the all of everything; the only thing worth living *well* for. I may seem foolish and sentimental, but this is my first love story. Will you let me dedicate it myself to you? I cannot say how anxiously I shall await your answer."

She both laughed and cried when the letter came. It seemed too good to be true. He was very dear to her, and it was heavenly to know that at last, in spite of himself, he loved her, since she had cared for him afar off, for so long. Perhaps if she hadn't cared at all, except from the cat-like point of view of maintenance and home, she would have written him a polite acceptance on the spot.

But, then, she did care intensely—more, even, than she would own to herself. And so, alas! she temporised.

With a happy laugh, she kissed and re-folded his letter, and having wrapped it in a sheet of paper, wrote: "Unsuitable. Declined with thanks." And sent it back to him.

"It's a just revenge," she told herself, with a tender smile that made her sweet face glorious. "He'll get this by the first post in the morning, just as I used to do his horrid refusals. In the afternoon I'll go myself and say that I've reconsidered my rejection, and will accept his love-story, if he'll only promise that the last chapter shall be as loving as the first."

She did this out of fun and sheer lightheartedness, not knowing how ill he was or how she might be likely (in his weak condition) to hurt and distress him by so doing.

That night she was too happy to sleep. It seemed as if the morning would never come.

"I love him—I love him," she murmured, over and over again.

"I wonder if he will guess that I kissed his letter? Will he be angry? I wonder what he'll say to me? When he knows how much I care, he will surely forget to scold me."

It was very early in the afternoon when she started, it having taken her nearly all the morning to dress.

Her wonderful hair had been brushed and smoothed till its coils shone like the curves of a copper medallion. The ink stains had been scrubbed out of her fingers and her gloves darned.

Hat and dress had been brushed and coaxed into an artistic impression of smartness.

But the happiness in her deep, dark-coloured eyes, and the smile on her soft, curved mouth, were things to make one forget fashion and its follies.

Coming in sight of the handsome house where he lived, she grew very nervous, and looked down shamefacedly at the pavement; walking along more slowly with her courage at vanishing point.

Going up the steps with a fast beating heart, she ventured to look up as she rang the bell, and then it struck her as being strange that every blind should be drawn down, as if its owner were away.

After a little delay the door was opened by a mournful-looking man-servant.

"I wish to see Mr. Signett at once on very important business," she said demurely.

"I am very sorry, madam," the man replied; "er—but Mr. Signett is dead. He died quite suddenly this morning when reading his letters."

Jessie Carvell.

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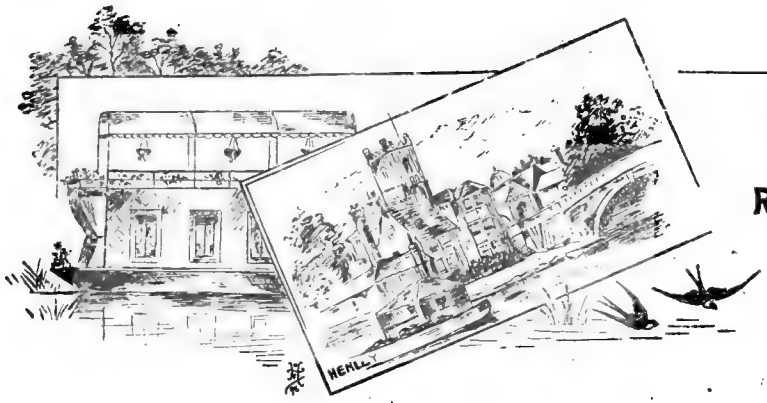

Jumbled Story No. 17.

REDEN'S HUGE CART.

(*See page* 519.)

I shall remember all my life, whenever I eat a brambles with their sweet, wild fruit, and eglantines, separated from the neighbouring road by the hedge so loving.

In the Curé's garden there are birds. In spring the peonies are red, like great gossips, and the neglected alleys where the grass grows wild, where the needs of life, human suffering, political affairs, submits.

* * * * *

I know a country Curé who has a little garden.

In the Curé's garden is an arbour, and under the trees and two apricot trees; there is—there is peonies and pansies. The strawberries are perfumed, my friend. Whatever they do, God permits it."

There are pear trees, muscadine grapes and dwarf like vagabonds—as they are!—where one meets apple trees.

* * * * *

Everyone may visit the garden, the like of which are joyous.

In the Curé's garden there are gravel paths. For me I have loved only Thee, Creator!"

Love is a conqueror—it should be proclaimed!

I take Thérèse's hand and kiss it. Thérèse drops a coin in the little box.

In the Curé's garden there is a niche painted blue with mossy roses and red fruit, from which one however, one takes a fruit, plucks a flower, and I drop a penny in the alms box for the poor.

* * * * *

In the Curé's garden one cannot hide; it touches the church on one side, and on the other is only the kitchen."

The Curé regarded us tenderly, and murmured:

"Thérèse, I love thee! Thérèse, I love thee!"

But what need to conceal it when one loves?

She looks in my eyes and smiles; then in her turn see a peasant who watched us over the hedge.

"Thou wishest to become my child?" he said.

She was an orphan; her uncle, the Curé, had the poppies in their red hoods disport themselves upside down.

* * * * *

"Is it you, Monsieur Valentine?"

"How pleasant it is here!"

In the Curé's garden there are strawberries, peony seemed to say to me:

I have eaten the fruit, I have gathered the flower, which is written "For the poor." There are peach is not in the whole village. On one condition, is a Holy Virgin; under the Holy Virgin is a box on tears.

In the Curé's garden the Curé entered, and came and sprinkled with little yellow stars; in the niche the birds sing of love, they warble of the morning which at this very moment were turning the village to seek us.

The strawberry was exquisite. I put the pansy in her eyes, and was happy, so happy that I did not adopted her—he spoiled her, the good old man!

* * * * *

In the Curé's garden I forgot the whole world, of thorns, from behind which we were espied by the poor, that I found happiness in the Curé's garden.

I say to Thérèse:

"It is, then, very good to love the creature? Gravel is the waxed floor of the garden. I prefer God and the Virgin Mary! They are not alone, they build in the trees, they hop in the grass—they strawberry, gather a pansy, or give a penny to the peasant.

The Curé answered:

"And I? Have you forgotten me?"

"You resemble a cook, and you belong only to Thérèse, the Curé's niece.

* * * * *

I looked at Thérèse, so pretty, so good, so sweet, surprises on every side; rosy honey-suckles, makes wine.

The peasant told all to the Curé.

Jean Pierre bowed his head and retired, ashamed.

And I had the air of replying:

"Jean Pierre, I have confided them to the good pansies have little faces like heraldic griffins.

"They were alone," he said. "He kissed her!"

* * * * *

I threw myself on his neck; Thérèse burst into my buttonhole.

And I kissed her hands, I looked earnestly into everything, my faith! in the Curé's garden.

I ate a strawberry and gathered a pansy. The arbour is a bench, on which is seated Mademoiselle she takes my hand, and placing it on her heart:

"Feel how it beats!" she says.

HONOR LUCELLE.

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THE LAST KING OF ATLANTIS

By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

SUMMARY.

ARNON'S memory of his early days begins at a time when he finds himself abandoned on the seashore, whence he discovers the cave of a band of pirates, by whom he is captured. Under the care of Didron the Chief he grows up as one of them, and on the death of the former he takes command. Viol is the daughter of Didron and marries Arnon, who, on one of his voyages, lands at Miropis and consults the Priest of the Spirit of Truth, from whom he learns that within a year and a half he will be a captive in a foreign land, and that he need not fear death until he has visited the Grotto of the Sleeper three times. On returning, he finds his ship burnt and men killed. After fighting he escapes, and meets and falls in love with Briseis, daughter of King Dulo X. of Atlantis, and to her he reveals his identity. Vichri, Briseis' cousin and lover, believes Arnon to be dead. For several months he lives at the Court; but the old roving spirit returns, and he sets out to discover the cave of treasure left by Didron and his band. On his return from an unsuccessful attempt, he finds his identity discovered by King Dulo, and is sent away as a galley slave. During his absence in a small boat up a creek on the Coast of Nubia, the ship is taken by rebels. Led by Arnon, the whole of the population, starving and fearing annihilation by the rebels, set out for another town.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAND OF KHEM.

FIVE thousand strong we left our starting place. Less than two hundred strong we staggered, footsore, despairing, into the ominously silent streets of deserted Eklohn. Our last faint hope was broken. The city had fallen long ago—perhaps before we had begun our fruitless quest.

Grass was growing on the public pavements, noxious weeds and rank shrubs everywhere filled the air with their deadly odours and forced their way between the huge stone slabs, uplifting even the very longest; jackals and hyenas, bats and vultures, roamed savagely or flitted clumsily in the marble halls that for many months, perchance, had echoed to no sound but their quarrelsome snarlings, hoarse screechings, and dog-like barks as they fought over the bones of the dead; pillars lay where the ruthless hands of the barbarians had thrown them, broken, disfigured; three large merchant ships from the far East, veritable giants of the deep, lay rifled and rotting by the moss-grown quay, over which, on one side, now that the harbour-dredging had ceased, the sand had drifted in great, red masses, bidding fair in time to choke up the haven and leave Ekholn, once famous as a seaport, far inland, buried in a desert or a reedy marsh; and over the whole of the great city, like a funeral pall, hung a dense, miasmatic mist, whose breath is a shivering fever that ends in death.

I held down my blade.

The Temple of Truth, far-famed for its grandeur and the opulence of its priests, stood in grim and silent protestation to the ruin that surrounded it, the great female figure typical of Truth looking to the west and to Atlantis with her sightless eyes over the great round world, unmoved by the evilness of mortal men. On a stone, hard by, one of the priests had scratched his last lament for the defeat of his country and the loss of her fairest province, writing it, perhaps, in his death-throes, when the sackers had left the city, and he alone remained—to die.

It may well be that in untold ages, after I am resolved into the elements, when Atlantis herself shall be but an ill-remembered name, some daring traveller will penetrate this land of hot deserts, tangled forests, and great lakes, and, coming here by chance, will wander wonderingly through these mighty ruins, amazed at their grandeur, and marvelling greatly that the builders thereof should be so utterly forgotten amongst the nations.*

But our eyes saw no grandeur in those relics of struggle and sack, and so, in a fierce mood, we turned our steps to the west again, and then to the north, past a rocky barren region, where the hills are honeycombed with monstrous caves, and into the great forest once more.

Fever now thinned our ranks with deadly speed, and one by one the children and the women and the weaker men were left for ever, loosely buried in the undergrowth, till only three score fighting men remained. Amongst the happy dead were my good old captain, and Teli, the aged waterman, both jettisoned now in their last port.

For some days we had seen no trace of our black foes, and our vigilance relaxed, so that one night we all slumbered, even the solitary watcher at his post, and our wanderings were at last ended. Thus it came about.

Being the most wary of the party through the lessons of my pirate life, I woke with a start towards the middle of the night, when the full-orbed moon was shedding her silver beams far and wide, and throwing up the shadowy forms of the leaf-laden trees with a weird distinctness, and peering round me to discover the cause of my disturbance, discerned some slightly moving shapes behind a clump of dates. Cautiously I woke my fifty and odd comrades in turn, enjoining strict silence, and when all were ready, with weapons to hand, we lay and waited. On all sides we saw the moving figures, now here, now there, and at intervals caught the flash of light on polished metal as a shield or a spear showed in the leafy openings.

* NOTE.—Those who have read Mr. R. Haggard's "She," will, perhaps, recognise in this the solution of the mystery of the immense ruins there and here described!

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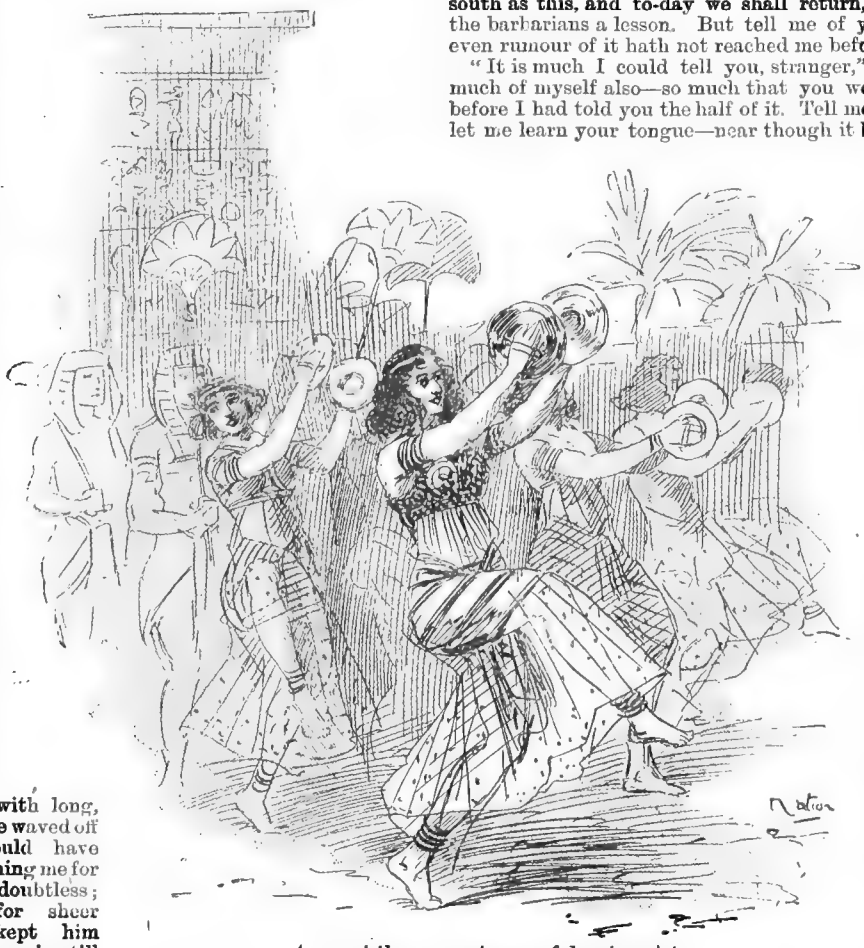
Then, with a sudden, simultaneous rush, they came at us from every point in the encompassing circle, and we were fighting back to back against fearful odds for our very lives. A cloud, presageful of storm, crept up and overspread the pallid face of the moon, so that we could scarce make out our foes, and thus in semi-darkness we strove like lions brought to bay, with the energy born of a terrible hate and a fixed despair.

Ye spirits! How we wrought that night in the Nubian forest! How we charged and were driven back, how they pressed us sorely, but could not make us yield, how many were the dead who encircled our last stand like a rampart of human flesh! Our enemies, we saw, in the moments when the moon stole through the clouds, were armed with long shields, all covered with mystic symbols and writings—strange shields for Nubians to wear, we thought—and once or twice, in a lull in the struggle, I fancied that when I caught a glimpse of a head and face, it seemed not black and woolly, but a swarthy colour, and covered with a closely-fitting head-gear.

However, I fought on, now with sling and now with sword, till presently I stood with back to a broad tree, separated from the rest and antagonised by a stalwart foe with long, keen sword. He waved off these who would have aided him, meaning me for his own prize, doubtless; and there, for sheer vexation, I kept him thrusting and parrying till the day broke and the birds began to sing in joyous ignorance of the slaughter that had been.



Amongst them came troops of dancing girls.

Long before then the rest of my comrades had fallen, every man of that brave band, and once again I alone remained alive in a struggle when all my friends were slain.

"Now yield!" cried he of the long keen sword, and I understood his speech, though it differed somewhat from my own or that of the blacks. "Now, yield, and I will spare your life, as I would be glad to do."

I thought a moment, and then, reflecting that I had shown him that my knowledge of sword-play was not of yestereve, held down my blade, something—from whence I know not—whispering in my ear that not yet nor thus should I meet my end.

"You have fought well," said he to whom I surrendered; "methought, before daybreak, that you were no Nubians. Whence came you, and what is your nation?"

"Atlantis is my nation, a land far out in the western sea," I answered, "and they whom you have slain were the last of my countrymen whom the Nubian rebels had left alive in this that was once our province. But I thought you were Nubians till I saw your shields. Of what nation are you?"

"I come from Egypt, the Land of Khem," said he with pride, "being sent by Pharaoh to chastise these turbulent blacks, a great band of whom we met and routed but three days ago. Never before have Egyptians ventured so far south as this, and to-day we shall return, having taught the barbarians a lesson. But tell me of your country, for even rumour of it hath not reached me before to-day."

"It is much I could tell you, stranger," I replied, "and much of myself also—so much that you would be wearied before I had told you the half of it. Tell me your name and let me learn your tongue—near though it be to my own—a little better, and I will tell you as we journey north, for I would fain see your land, even if I must see it as a prisoner."

"That you need not do," said he with a brave man's generosity; "you shall go as my friend, whom I have rescued from the blacks. And men call me Asos, the son of Osymandyas, and in peace time I live at Memphis, where the Court is. It will be many months' journey before I see it again, even if no war should need me, for I am a captain in the army, and must do many little businesses for the King before I may return. But how are you named, friend whom I have found at the sword point?"

"My real name is Arnon, the son of Didron the pirate," I answered, "and I have been known as Phrena the Iron-fingered, of late."

"Art young for thy skill and strength and experience," he remarked, when I told him of that last sea-fight when old Didron fell. "Art young, or I would get thee into the King's bodyguard. Tell me more of thy country."

So, as we travelled northward, keeping my sword and sling and marching with the others as a soldier, dressed in the uniform of a fallen Egyptian, I told Captain Asos of the greatness of Atlantis; of its colonies in the great land to the westward, peopled for the most part with savages more

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crafty and cruel than those of Nubia; of its wealth and luxury, that was sapping the vitals of its vigour; of its temples and buildings, its harbours and fortresses, its navy of a thousand ships, and its army of twenty times ten thousand men.

Asos listened gravely to my tale. He was a tall, clean-shaven man, with sinews strongly knit, a mind that knew no fear, and a face that seldom broke into a smile; but when I told him of our army, thinking to astonish him, he laughed at me outright. I asked him why.

"Talk not of armies!" said he, with a scornful glance: "when you come to Khem, I can show you an array that would swallow up your men five times over."

"In numbers, it may be," I retorted sharply, my patriotism rising for the first time, "but not on the battle-field, methinks!" And this time it was my turn to smile.

Thus, with boast and counter boast, and comparison of peoples and their ways, we emerged from the forest and set out across a narrow stretch of desert, glaring balefully under a burning sun, full of rocky hillocks and ridges, indeed, but without a shade sufficient to cool our many men in the heat of the day.

Tantalisingly beautiful and enticing mirages we saw also, when our throats were most parched and our feet most weary, but never a fertile oasis or a refreshing spring. It was soon passed, however, and after a dank morass and another desert march, with a slight gale blowing the fine, red sand into our faces in scorching clouds, we came to Egypt, and, passing by the three great pyramids, larger even than the great group to the north of Kronos, where the Kings of Atlantis are buried, we entered into the Royal city on the banks of the mystic Nile.

On all sides, as we trod the stony central way, a festive throng beset us, singing, dancing, shouting, and some clad in the most outrageously grotesque costumes, many-coloured as the rainbow. Amongst them came troops of dancing girls, wantonly capering to the clashing of cymbals, the tinkling of square tambourines, and the shrill, piercing music of single and double pipes; while after these tumultuously ran, jumped, or rolled, bands of hired buffoons disporting themselves to the same silly medley of music, these latter, mostly blacks, being clad in bull's hide, so cut and worn as to leave a tail hanging ludicrously behind!

A little further on, as we neared a massive temple with the sun glittering from its polished marble towers, and reflected from its gates of bronze where the lepers sat, the low but swelling chorus of its priests fell upon our ears, now rising, now falling, now pouring forth in volumes of rich, strong melody.

"What means this merry-making?" I asked of Asos, thinking to myself that here, at least, was a city large as Kronos, which before I had thought matchless.

"It is the nineteenth day of the first month, that is named the month of Thoth," said he, "and this is the feast that is called by that name. See, here come the priests of Pthah!"

Slowly the brazen temple doors swung back, and, still chanting the tuneful song of Maneros, a long procession of clean-shaven, hairless, hard-skulled priests came forth, and greeting us with the salutation, "*How sweet a thing is truth!*" wended their stately way adown the avenue of tamarisk trees and were lost to view beyond in the ever-mingling throng of roysterers. Severity and temperance, in food and drink, charity and truth, no matter what befall, they preached to the careless crowd, many of whom, even as they listened, pledging each other and making themselves drunk with the heady zythus of Pelusium. So little valued they the admonitions.

Asos, impatient, moved on, and having reported the fruits of his mission to the King—named, he told me, Menophres—and transacted his business with his superior officer, led me to his own dwelling, for he had taken a strange liking to me.

It was a large house, stuccoed and flat-roofed, and as we entered the porch before the door, with its two columns flanking the stone statues of the bull Apis and the Athor Isis, my host pointed out to me some cabalistic scrawlings on the slab above, thus: which he said was the sign of the good house; and some other gravings on the stone—curious birds and fishes, and to me quaint meaningless strokes and circles—which, he told me with pride, was the name of the King, and could only be written upon the houses of those who were his servants.

Then when we had entered, and I had been presented to the wife of Asos, Itaska by name, who regarded me too boldly, I thought, for one bound to another, and I had eaten of honey and eggs, which is customary at the feast of Thoth, I rose and went out into the cool night air, thinking to enjoy the strangeness, the novelty, of all things I might see. What I should do, what would be my lot in this great land, where wealth was scattered broadcast, I knew not, thought not, cared not, but only, as I stood in the open air, beyond the houses of the city, bethought me for the thousandth time of the loss of Briseis, and wondered yet again if she were false or true.

Whether the Spirit of Love works her ends by means we wot not of, or whether the other gods must bend to her will and order things to suit her fancies, I cannot say, but this I can aver, that if I had not wandered, a solitary stranger, that peaceful eve, I had never beheld Atlantis more, had never been its King, had never clasped my dearest love to my arms again, so fateful were the doings of those midnight hours.

Far from the city, now sunk into slumber, save for its watchmen and the priests who meditated on the pylons of the temple of Pthah, I strayed—forgetful in my reverie, of Asos—into the arid, treeless waste to the south, where the dreary dryness of the soil was unrelieved except by rocky ridges, and here and there a collection of tombs dug out or built upon the hillsides, the last resting-places of the bodies of the poorer classes who could afford no costlier mausoleums.

Bright and clear, in that dry and thirsty atmosphere, shone the countless stars, shining down alike upon the lately festive city and the fertile fields to the north and east; upon the deep, wide-rolling flood of Sihor, resistless in its majesty, and the great four-angled pyramids pointing ever up into the roofless sky; upon the grave, immobile features of the giant Sphinx Horemku, and upon the place of tombs where I stood, marvelling greatly at the weird vastness of all that I saw that was of the handiwork of man, and the niggardness of parent Earth, who, but for the ancient river, had made this land a howling wilderness.

Truly the Nile—the Mother of Rivers, as her people call her—is the sole upholder of the Land of Khem, without whose tireless torrent and yearly flood, temples, cities, villages, and fields would alike be buried under drifting storms of finely-sifted desert sand.

Now, as I stood, thus pondering, a feeling grew upon me that I was not there alone—a strange, uneasy feeling, as of a spirit's prompting. At first I scouted it and put it from me, but it came again and again, and, half fearful, half angry, I turned my gaze to the tombs amongst which I had wandered.

Seeing no sign of the presence which I felt, I turned my steps, now here, now there, among the mazy ways, and at last, coming round the side of a huge stone cairn, thrown up, it may be, to cover a goodly number of the luckless dead in a common grave, I beheld a sight that caused the blood to chill in its channels, and my heart, for a moment, to stand still with horror.

By the side of a low-built tomb sat a fair maiden, weeping softly to herself over the cold covering of the dead, her rich auburn hair falling loosely on her shoulders, and partly hiding the sweetness of her dainty face, which, for all the dimness of the light, was plainly visible. But it was not she, for all her loveliness, that riveted my

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awestruck gaze. Near her—so near that she might almost have touched him by putting out her arm—crouched a spotted leopard, ready to spring, deterred only for the moment by the light sound of my footfall, which his suspicious ears had caught.

A great, evil beast he was, with cruel, rolling eyes, and sleek, shining coat, and thickened tail softly twitching on the dusty ground in anticipation of his easy prey. Yet he must have been hungry to have ventured so near the haunts of men and for his ribs to stand out so boldly that, given time, I could have counted them!

For a brief space, it seemed less than the lasting of a lightning flash, I stood motionless, whilst he glared fiercely at me for my intrusion, and snapped his cruel jaws, and gave a low, angry snarl.

The sound startled the weeping maid, and looking up to see the great cat so near, she uttered a scream of terror and essayed to fly from the spot. In a moment, the leopard, disregarding me in his haste, made his deadly leap, but that same moment, having fitted my last leaden bullet to my sling, I let him have the hissing missile with terrific force, and though it failed to reach his head, as I had meant, it found its billet in his left shoulder, shattering the bone and thus crippling one of his taloned paws. With a growl of pain and rage, the spotted beast turned upon me in all his agile lissomness, but I had thrown aside my useless sling, and sword in hand, awaited his onslaught with a grim, exultant joy.

I was borne to the ground by his weight.

High he sprang, with claws extended and jaws open, roaring with pain the while; down he came full weight upon my upheld blade, the point passing clear through and out above his back, missing the spine by the merest of unlucky chances.

To my dismay, before I could withdraw it, before I could ward off the blows and scratches of his great sharp talons, the sword was snapped off at the hilt by the violent twistings of the maddened brute, and, weaponless, I was borne to the ground by his weight, hearing as I fell a cry of fear from the maid.

But I was not called the Iron-fingered for nothing! and so, with a powerful grasp, I seized him by the throat, pressing out his life as I had done old Zerah's years before. This time, however, by the gods! I had a tougher task, for it seemed likely that I should be torn to pieces before the breath was stifled in that vicious animal, who must have had a dozen lives to have struggled with all those wounds and with that sharp-edged sword rankling in his body!

Over and over we rolled in the death grip, I and that raging beast, his three uninjured feet ripping and scratching, his hideous mouth opening and closing with short, savage gasps, his flaming yellow orbs fixed on mine in horrid enmity, and his great chest heaving laboriously against my own.

Now his struggles abated, his breath came shorter, the blood-wetted claws relaxed their hold, the flaming orbs ceased to roll and begun to glaze with the ghastliness of death, and presently, with a quiver, the lithe form lay still at my side. Till then—till I knew that he was dead, not once had my fingers loosed their grasp; then a great dimness seemed to pass between myself and all around, and I had scarce time to extricate me from that awful embrace when the faintness seized me, and, stumbling across the yet warm carcase, all sense of time and place and act fled away, leaving only a voiceless void of densest darkness in its stead.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Vision of Isis.

I lingered some weeks—a month it may have been—'twixt life and death after that awful fight, and when I knew the light of day again and could look about me, I found that I was watched and tended at the house of the fair maiden whom I had rescued—tended, too, by her fair hands. It was a spacious dwelling on the northern side of Memphis, its grove of cedars leading into the temple grounds, and its windows looking out upon the sculptured obelisks of the portal.

"Sleep hath held thee long, stranger," said a middle-aged man who stood by the bedside when I first came to full consciousness, his hand upon the maiden's head, as if in tender blessing. Well I remember him, whose kindly soul befriended me so long and truly in that far-off land of mighty buildings and ancient lore; a tall man, plain and rugged, on the further side of fifty years, with a restless mouth, and a way of laughing silently when he spoke with mirth—which was not seldom—that was terribly infectious.

"It is well for me, then," I answered him, "that I have slept at the house of a friend," the memory of what must have led to my being there coming up before me as a vision.

"Other than a friend's my house could not be," he said, "to one who has risked his life for my only child. Few of our people would have dared so much."

"I dared not have dared less," I replied, "when so fair and young a maiden was in peril."

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"Seemst thou canst use a honeyed tongue as well as sharpened steel, my son," said Mitres, as my host was named, with one of his quiet smiles, "and it may be as dangerous to young and untried hearts to see or hear too much of thee as to court the company of hungry leopards amongst the tombs."

"Nay, art too pointed in thy sayings, father," protested the maiden, "and may offend this stranger who called himself Arnon in his sleep, when we would fain offer him our gratitude for his timely help."

"'Tis a gentle soul of thine, Vesta" answered he, "but surely thou knowest that I spoke in jest, and am every whit

Tended, too, by her fair hands.

as thankful as thyself for our guest's brave deed. Now, tell him, pray, for what thou sat in that solitary place at night, weeping like a lovesick maid!"

At this, sweet Vesta hung her head, blushing in the prettiest confusion, but would not speak, and her father reiterating his request with a mirthful twinkle in his eye, strange to see on so grave a face, she fled from the room, though first casting a brief look upon me from those confiding eyes of hers that opened my own and filled me with dire forebodings.

Wherever there are women there are troubles, soon or late, I had found in my short life, and it was as though I saw the shadow of a coming cloud in that swift-shot glance. When the hanging draperies had closed behind her, Mitres spoke:

"An she will not tell thee herself, I must, my son. She wept over the grave of one whom she loved, one who was of a lowly caste and not worthy of her, and whom the gods (in their wisdom) called to Amenti before it was too late. May Set rend him! May Atmoo, Nef, and Amun curse him!" Then, calming himself after this sudden outburst, he went on: "But since you rescued her she has ceased to visit the spot, and has seemed a different child."

Leaving me to make what I could of this information, my host reclined thoughtfully in his chair for a time. At last he broke the silence.

"How had you thought to live, stranger, now that you have no kin in the land? For Asos, the captain, who has now been made a general, has told me how he rescued you from the black barbarians he fought and slew."

"It was in my mind to join the King's army," I returned, "for I have a sore sorrow in my life, and where the battle-press is thickest, and the clash of arms is loudest, is to me the greatest joy."

To which my host answered that he would rather I became a priest, as he was, promising me great riches, grand dwellings, honour, and the envy and admiration of all men therewith. At first the idea did not please me, who was so used to action, and had heretofore looked down on the priestly calling; but so many were his arguments and allurements, and promises of help and friendship withal, that I wavered a little out of mere respect for his superior years; and finally, so urgent was he, so imperative, that I was fain to consent, the more so when he told me, as the crowning inducement, that war had ceased for the time being in the Land of Khem, that the army was partially disbanded, that quiet reigned in all its nomes, and on all its borders peace.

So I prepared to become a priest and to be instructed in all the learning of the Egyptians, as Vesta's father wished, though why he so desired I could not divine, nor did I discover till after his wish was fulfilled.

To hundred-gated Thebes the King now moved his court, and thither went Mitres and his daughter (for his wife was dead), and also Asos and his family, for all must needs be in attendance on the wants and whims of Pharaoh and his royal wife and sister, Queen Hameuse. With them, of course, I journeyed, having first been initiated into the rudiments of priestcraft, and having spent a night of watching in the arched gallery cut in the rock near Memphis, where, in their huge stalls, like the sarcophagi of giants, the embalmed Apis bulls are buried, and where they will repose for ages in awful, silent solemnity.

At Thebes I was enrolled among the many priests in the mighty temple of Karnac, where I learned many things that are made known only to the privileged orders. They taught me the enchantments that have power with the lower gods; the raising of the Ancient Sin, the dread demon that sleepeth in every soul, and is of icy chilliness until it is warmed and wakened into baleful life; the sign of doom, which will reveal to the daring questioner the hour and the moment and the manner of his dying, and the utterance of dread, which none may speak and to which none may listen, with uncovered head and yet live, and which, when spoken, discloses to the mental gaze the million-million shades that haunt the vasty halls of grim Amenti, and gives the speaker power to bring back from there for a space, and question, the triple spirits of the newly dead. I was made to understand the secret mysteries of the esoteric faith; of the birth, death, and resurrection of Osiris; of his love for the world, which was so great that he gave his son Horus to save men from their wicked ways, and of the Mother Isis, the Spirit of the Universe, who reveals the fringe of her glory only to a favoured, faithful few.

Her I saw once only in all my nightly vigils, but the memory of her appearing haunts me even now. It was in an inner chamber of that sculptured, columned Temple of Karnac, where the neophyte must pass many days in prayer and fasting. Mitres, who stood high in the land for his piety and goodness, was with me, aiding my supplications with his own, and bade me be of good cheer, for if the presentment of the Great Mother should appear to me that night, my days of trial and preparation were over, and I could go forth fully instructed.

Already I was wise in the lore of the stars, in the reading of the Sacred Book of the Dead, in the mystic symbol writing of the sculptures and in the sending forth of the spirit; and one thing only I lacked; one ordeal alone remained.

In the dread silence of that darkened chamber we waited, I and that jolly priest, hearing even the throbbing of our hearts in the stillness, and seeing strange weird shapes and shadows in the spectral gloom, till, as the heavens lost the dim afterglow of the twilight and the sparkling stars came out, first one by one and then by tens and hundreds, the pale rays of the Northern Star, round which the firmament revolves—the star in the figure of the dragon—shot through the slanting window in the wall and rested on the golden scarabæus that gleamed with iridiscent lustre on my forehead.

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"Now is the appointed time," said Mitres slowly, "and by the awful name of Osiris, which none may unworthily pronounce and live, I ask our Mother Isis to smile upon thee, our adopted son," and whilst he spoke he drew back a space, and waved the wand over my head, twice, thrice, and then was still.

With a loud, vibrating roar the room and all within vanished, its four walls receding to the north and south and east and west, its roof ascending to the zenith, and its floor falling—falling into the bottomless gulf beneath, till, in the twinkling of an eye I seemed to hang on nothing in the centre of the awful abyss of space. Even my bodily form and feelings disappeared, leaving me a naked soul suspended motionless in the dread darkness that was void and yet intensely real.

Then all the stars blazed out in their innumerable multitude, ten thousandfold more plentiful than the keenest earthly eye can see, and, by Apis! when I looked again more carefully I saw that most were coloured, shining in all the many tints of red and green and blue and orange and yellow, some in pairs and some in clusters, and all attended by a train of subject worlds, as earth and the seven other planets dance around the gorgeous sun, only that on many of those favoured orbs a day would see them pass through the glories of an orange sunset and a deep blue dawn, with, perchance, a violet noon between.

Again I looked, and this time I saw that all these gleaming stars were fiery, flaming suns, some smaller, but most larger than our own, and that intermixed with them, invisible to mortal gaze, but countless in number as the grains of dust in a desert storm, there floated on the sea of space a multitude of dark, cold orbs, as it were suns that were burned out and rolled along in silent lifelessness for ever.

At last the Shape spoke.

And everywhere throughout the round immensity there roamed strange astral shapes, now whirling madly past a glowing sun, now slowly traversing an empty region, and anon breaking up, like a shower of sparks, into innumerable fragments, huge cosmic dust-swarms, which drifted hither and thither in quantity that passes comprehension.

Then it seemed to me that I moved, though I felt no quiver of translation; the stars shot past me on either side like long flashes of many-coloured light, behind, they closed in swiftly on my track, in front, the figure of Orion opened out and widened till its points were lost in the dark vault around, and I hung near the giant cluster of orbs which men call the Pleiades, itself a universe of flaming suns, mid which stood out nine giant worlds, transcending all their neighbours.

Through the distance shone the fierce Dog Star, blazing red, a veritable monarch of the skies, out-shining all and sundry of its rivals in the visible portion of illimitable space.

Then suddenly, as I gazed in wonder at the marvels of the heavens, I heard a sound as of the beating of many spirit-wings coming from afar. It deepened and deepened till it grew to the noise of a mighty rushing wind, it softened again to a murmur as of many waters and then ceased, whilst, but faintly heard in infinite vastness, came stealing the distant sound of music, the piping of the sweet-toned flute, the twanging of the seven-stringed harp, and the harmony of the rattling rings and jingling bars of the sistrum; and not one flute I heard, but many, not one harp, but a chiming chorus, not one sistrum, but the mingled melody of a thousand sistra, yet one and all invisible.

Now, as the cadences of heavenly music rose and fell in pure, majestic chords and sweetest symphonies, I saw a Shape grow slowly in the region beyond the stars, a shadowy Shape which, seen through the long vista of heated suns and dancing worlds, seemed to have a dim and wavy form, suggesting something of a female figure, yet so awful in its surpassing loveliness that my soul trembled at the sight thereof, and I feared the Unknown Form. Nearer and nearer it came, growing larger and more definite with its approach, and I doubted no longer that it was given to me to behold the presentment of the Mother Isis, who was and is and shall be.

But what pen, what tongue, can describe the glory of her face, the power of her mere presence, the beauty of whose form was Loveliness's Own? I cannot, nor wish, nor shall make attempt; enough to say that even my memory now refuses to recall the spiritual charm of that cloud-Shape in its entirety.

At last the Shape spoke, though it seemed to me that the sound came from the unfathomable depths beyond the great star-clouds like the far-off echo of a rippling stream, with something of the sighing of the summer wind intermingled with it; and this was the burden of the speech, so sweetly borne upon my spirit ears.

"Thou whom men call Arnon, dost feel no fear in my presence, who appear but once to mortal men?"

And I answered tremblingly:

"I fear, on account of the strangeness of my vision, but not of thy power, oh, Mother of worlds!"

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"Well is it spoken, mortal," the sweet voice said, still sounding faintly, as heard through a thick, deep veil; "but know, thou of little faith, who expected not this vision, who art still at heart an alien to Egypt's gods: know this, that I have granted thee this favour to speak a word of comfort to thee, that thou may'st take heart and live, and do the work that it is ordained thou shall perform."

There was a moment's pause, in which I heard, softly as before, the sound of the ringing staves of a thousand sistra, shaken by spirit hands. Then the voice went on:

"Great is thy part, mortal, in the doings of thy land, and thither shalt thou return when the time is ripe, but deem not that I shall cease to watch thee when thou goest out of the Land of Khem. 'Twas I who guided thy childish hands to the stairway on the rock when thou wast nigh to death by the buffetings of the thoughtless waves; 'twas I who brought thee unscathed through the fire when all thy comrades fell at Miropis; 'twas I who put mercy into the heart of Asos, when otherwise his men had slain thee in the Nubian forest; and in the hour of thy greatest need 'tis I will ward off the blow from thy head, and save thee from Amenti till the span of thy years be full.

Here I waited, listening.

"And this remember, favoured mortal, that thy true beloved thou shalt meet again, and all shall be between you as before; yet on thyself alone it turns whether thy days with Briseis be many or few, for a great temptation shall beset thee in thine own land, and as thou falleth before it or resisteth it, so shall thy wages be thereafter; but even in the worst, for mortal flesh is weak, it is granted thee to live when thy country dies, to succour many in their last distress, and to be clear in mind and sound in frame to the last.

"It has been given to many to whom I have revealed the fringe of my glory, to see the birth of suns and worlds from the fragments scattered through a million leagues of chaos, but inasmuch as thou art not of my chosen people, and will never pass behind the inmost veil of my temple, it is denied to thee.

"And now farewell, and if thou shouldst seek to see my face again or to hear once more the sound of my voice, thou must gaze upon the face of nature and hearken to the music of birds and brooks and whistling winds, for all things are in me and I in them, from Infinity to Infinity and from Everlasting to Everlasting."

The voice sank to an indistinguishable murmur, and then ceased, the shadowy Shape of incomparable beauty melted to a hazy cloud vanishing adown the vista of whirling worlds, and in that fearful, boundless vault was silence deep and dread. Then, like a meteor flash, I returned to the place where I had first hung motionless, the stars slid back on their courses, the great cluster of the Pleiades dwindled to a tiny cloud of twinkling points, the figure of Orion closed in to its wonted size, and all was still amid the glare of the many-coloured suns, till out of the north came a great blackness, swallowing up the heavens with capacious maw, and a voice said:

"It is enough!"

By the last gleam of light that remained I saw the roof of the chamber fall down from among the stars, the floor rise up from the gulf below, the walls close in from the four points of the heavens, and in bodily form I stood by the side of Mitres, in the temple of Karnac, the glow of a new dawn pouring in through the slanting casement.

"Breathe no word of detail of what thou hast seen or heard," said Mitres warningly, leading me before the assembled priests, where I was received with sacrifices and thanksgiving songs; and that day I entered on my duties, though more thoughtful and solemn than is my wont.

Mitres was hugely delighted that I had passed the ordeal so well, was unfailing in his words of good cheer and his quiet, catching mirth, the best of jolly companions, insisting most strongly that I shared his home till I could buy one for myself—which, he vouched, would not be long hence, and, when I hesitated, brought Vesta to join her entreaties to his. And so masterful was she with all her shy, sweet grace, that in the end I was fain to yield me to their wishes, lest I be thought churlish and ungrateful.

One thing I now saw clearly, that Vesta loved me, and that her father not only knew of it but rejoiced in the knowledge, having no object nearer to his heart than my union with his fair daughter, and yet neither had spoken a word to me that I could take advantage of.

But I did not love Vesta then, in spite of her youth and beauty, and whenever it came into my mind to marry her, seeing that Briseis was false and far away, the face of my Lady of Kronos, with royal blood in her veins, would rise before my mental eye, and I would put the thought from me, vowing inwardly that if I could not be hers I would be no other's.

So I stayed at the house of Mitres as a privileged guest, attending daily in that wondrous temple, reading the picture-writings on the wall, and watching the sculptors chiselling the shapeless slabs of stone to forms of love and awe, and recording Egypt's greatness and her conquests in imperishable monuments of living rock, destined, perchance, to endure when Khem herself shall be only a wreck of her present glory.

The days sped on. The Nile had overflowed its banks, covering the land with a deep deposit of rich, fertile soil, and the workers, relieved for a time from the drudgery of watering the land by means of poles and pitchers, had made merry over the signs of harvest when the swift-sown seeds sprang up from the grateful ground. The summer had waned and the month of Athyr come, when the Etesian winds had ceased, the Nile gone to its former bounds, and the nights grown longer, when fortune so favoured me that my name became famous through all the land.

It chanced one eve, as I walked through an inner corridor of the Temple, bending my way towards the Place of Counsel, where those in distress came to ask of Amun, that I heard hurried footsteps on the stony floor, and a warning whisper, "Peace!"

My curiosity was wakened, for I knew that dark deeds were sometimes planned in those shadowy chambers, and, resolved to know what need these unknown whisperers had of secrecy, I softly passed under a noiseless, swinging stone into a hidden recess running parallel to the corridor from whence the footsteps sounded, and from which every word uttered in the latter was distinctly audible.

Here I waited, listening.

(To be continued.)

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THE FRUIT OF THE RANDOM SEED.

"A Bank Manager, provided that the Chief Cashier is with him, and a visit from the Inspector is not imminent, has a better opportunity for wholesale robbery than the most accomplished professional thief in existence."

The words were spoken lightly and carelessly by a man in the stalls of the Pall Mall Theatre; yet if one person were more capable than another in judging such matters, it were assuredly the Chief Cashier of the Seacomb County Bank.

He did not know that his friend, the Manager of the Bank, was sitting in the seat behind him; he did not know that he had heard his words, with white face and starting eyes, and that he had repeated them over a hundred times as though to engrave them on his memory. How should he realise that the handful of seeds that he had thus sown at random had fallen on rich soil, and had taken firm root, and that they were destined to ruin his own life, and that of his colleague?

It seemed to the Bank Manager, sitting in the stall behind his Cashier, that the great theatre had drifted out of sight; the air of the swinging chorus grew fainter and fainter; the music of the orchestra was far away. Only these words rang incessantly in his ears: "Bank Manager—opportunity—opportunity—opportunity."

He rose from his seat and left the building; at that moment a roar of applause greeted a patriotic song, and from the midst of it voices were whispering to him, "Opportunity-tunity-tunity."

He went out into the streets. London in the midst of its revelry was ablaze with lights, but he heeded nothing. Men shouted to him, as bare-headed, wild-eyed, he crossed their path regardless of the traffic. Newsboys called out their news to him; men and women jostled him at every step; cabs dashed past him; but he saw them not; he went steadily forward until he left the roar of the great city behind him, and found himself in the Park, where a cool breeze was blowing, and the bright stars above were shining down.

He seated himself on a chair. "A Bank Manager," he spoke aloud unconsciously, "provided that the Chief Cashier is with him, and a visit from the Inspector is not imminent, has a better opportunity for wholesale robbery than the most accomplished professional thief in existence."

He paused for a moment, and then went on, "I am a Bank Manager; my Cashier is with me; aye, he is in my power, body and soul; the Inspector will not come yet."

He spoke in a curious, monotonous voice, and very earnestly.

"I am deeply in debt; my father lost £3,000 in the concern; if I take that sum I shall merely be taking what is my own."

The breeze whistled shrilly in the trees, and the man's over-strained nerves seemed to detect these words; "Lead us not into temptation; deliver us from evil."

He sprang to his feet with a hoarse imprecation.

"There is no temptation," he shouted back defiantly, "there is no evil; I shall merely be taking what is my own."

He ran hurriedly forward, and, hailing a cab, drove to his hotel. His mind was determined.

Thus the random seed which the Cashier had sown took firm root, and sprang into life.

* * * * *

The Manager's private room of the Seacomb County Bank was usually considered to be remarkably comfortable. The clerks looked into it with envious eyes when the door was open; the junior partner was wont to remark condescendingly that it was not half bad.

In the dead of night, however, when the inhabitants of the old-world, sleepy little town of Seacomb were wrapped in slumber, and the high stools and long counters of the Bank were deserted, the aspect of the little room was different. There was a weird, ghostly feeling in the air on the night when the Manager and Mr. Smithkins, the Chief Cashier, were closeted together for the last time.

"Smithkins," said the Manager, "have you forgotten what I once did for you?"

"How can you ask, sir? I shall never forget it as long as I live. Whenever the chance comes for me to do a good turn for you, I will take it. You may depend on me, sir."

"You will, Smithkins? You swear it?"

"Everything that is in my power I will do for you. I swear it."

"Well, the chance has come, Smithkins. Remember, you have sworn. My father, as you know, lost £3,000 in this bank. At the present moment I am deeply in debt, and, as I have often told you, I am thoroughly tired of this commercial life. How I came to be a

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manager of a bank, Heaven only knows. I have resolved, therefore, to take the sum of £3,000, to leave the country for ever, and to spend the remainder of my days in quiet and seclusion. You follow me?"

"What are you saying, sir? You must be mad. You cannot mean it—that you are going to run away with £3,000." The Cashier was dumfoundered.

"I mean it, Smithkins. I am not mad. I shall take £3,000, not a penny more, and all that I want you to do is to cover my retreat."

"It is impossible. I shan't allow you to do it. I shall stop you."

"You won't. You daren't."

The Manager shot the words out, and brought his fist down on the table with terrific force. The Cashier looked at him with the appealing eyes of a devoted dog.

"Think of Miss Catherine," he said at last. "You would not desert her."

The Manager was silent for a moment. Then he looked up with a bright smile.

"I leave her to you, Smithkins. You have frequently told me that she would be willing to marry you if I gave my consent. I leave her to you. She could not be in bett-r hands. On this condition you will do as I tell you?"

It was a terrible moment for the Chief Cashier. He loved his master's daughter more than his life, but he could not so easily be persuaded to allow a man to do so dark a deed. Yet he knew that no words of his would persuade the Manager; long ago he had sold himself to him; he was a tool in his hands.

"I agree," he said.

"Very well. It is late; let us go home."

The Manager preceded Smithkins to the door, locked it, and left the Bank. On the morrow, with £3,000 in his possession. he left for America, and not a trace of him was to be found.

Thus the random seed grew in strength, and bore fruit.

* * * * *

The Cashier stood on the door-step of his late Manager's house. His heart was beating like a sledge hammer.

"Is Miss Catherine at home?"

The door was held open, he passed in, and a moment later found himself in her presence.

"Miss Catherine, I bring bad news to you."

"Bad news, Mr. Smithkins? Mind I don't have your head chopped off, as they used to do to the bearers of evil tidings."

Miss Catherine was a charming little personage, who had no fear for anyone, and certainly not for her father's Cashier. At one time she had even amused herself by pretending that she was in love with him.

"Your father has suddenly been called away on business, and may not be home again for some time."

"How long is that, Mr. Smithkins?"

"A year, or—er—perhaps, two."

"This is, indeed, bad news. Did he leave no message for me?"

"He left a message, and by delivering this, I hope to reinstate myself in your favour. If you like it, you will not have my head chopped off?"

"Let me hear it first and then I will tell you."

"Well, his last wish was that you should marry——"

"Marry? Marry whom?"

"An ugly, unworthy person—me, Miss Catherine."

"*You*, Mr. Smithkins?"

"You *do* care for me, Miss Catherine? You will marry me?"

"Yes, but——"

The door opened, and Catherine could not finish her sentence. Thus she did not have an opportunity to answer, "Yes, she cared for him, certainly, but as certainly she did not love him."

Mr. Smithkins pressed her hand in a transport of delight, and left the room. A young man, handsome, dashing, well-dressed, came forward.

"Oh, Lord Harry, what do you think has happened? Mr. Smithkins came to say that my father has gone away for two years, and that he left a message that I was to marry him, and he asked me whether I didn't care for him and I said yes, and then you came in, and now he has gone away and thinks that I have promised to be his wife. What is to be done?"

"Why, you had better marry me at once," cried Lord Harry, as he took Miss Catherine boldly in his arms, and kissed her on her cheek.

Poor Smithkins at home thought that he would go mad with joy. He was a different man; he seemed to be living in a new world; his dingy lodgings were transformed into a palace. How deep and strong was his love for this poor girl he alone knew.

For the time he forgot the presence of the black cloud hanging over him that was soon to burst. The troubled times that were coming did not affect his happiness.

The cloud burst sooner than was expected. Some ten days after the Manager's disappearance the Inspector paid the periodical visit to the Bank. Then everything was discovered.

Never had the sleepy little town of Seacomb known such excitement. People swarmed to the Bank by hundreds to inquire after their savings. The wildest rumours were circulated on every side, and with the loss of the money the Manager's name was invariably associated.

At the earliest opportunity the Chief Cashier presented himself at the Manager's house. He must do his best to comfort Miss Catherine, and to prepare her for the alarming rumours which, sooner or later, were sure to reach her ears.

"Is it true, Mr. Smithkins," she cried, as soon as he had entered the room, "that £3,000 has been stolen from the Bank?"

"Ah, I was afraid that you would have heard. It is only too true. And I grieve to tell you, Miss Catherine, that, since no trace can be found of your father, people are talking—insinuating——"

"Insinuating that he took the money, Mr. Smithkins? How dare you hint at such a thing? Leave me this instant. Oh, this is too cruel."

The poor girl burst into a flood of tears.

"Believe me, Miss Catherine, not for a moment would I have harboured such a thought against your father. I was merely going to warn you against any idle rumour that you might hear. Your father is the most upright and honest man that ever lived."

The Cashier did not know what he was saying. The sight of the girl's distress completely upset him.

"Oh, Catherine," he cried, "will you not be my wife, and let me comfort you?"

The girl dried her tears, and choking back her sob, answered in a brave voice: "That is impossible, Mr. Smithkins. I am already engaged to Lord Harry. I fear that you misunderstood me the other day."

With these words ringing in his ears, broken-hearted,

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the Cashier left the house. Presently, without knowing that he had moved, he found himself in his lodgings. A crumpled envelope, addressed in a well-known hand, was lying on his table. He tore it open hastily; it came from the father of the girl he loved, and contained only these words: "I am dying. The doctor says that there is no hope."

A great cry went up from his soul; he buried his face in his hands, and for a long while remained quite still. He thought of his past life, and of all the deeds that he had ever done—and he thought of the future. He thought of the sweet face of the girl who had no love for him. Now there was a stain on her name, and her life would be ruined. Her friends would desert her; who would have dealings with the daughter of a felon?

Sobs shook the strong man's frame.

Presently he seized pen and paper, and in a short, kind little note, told the poor girl that her father was dead.

"What is life to me now," he cried. "Why should I live longer?"

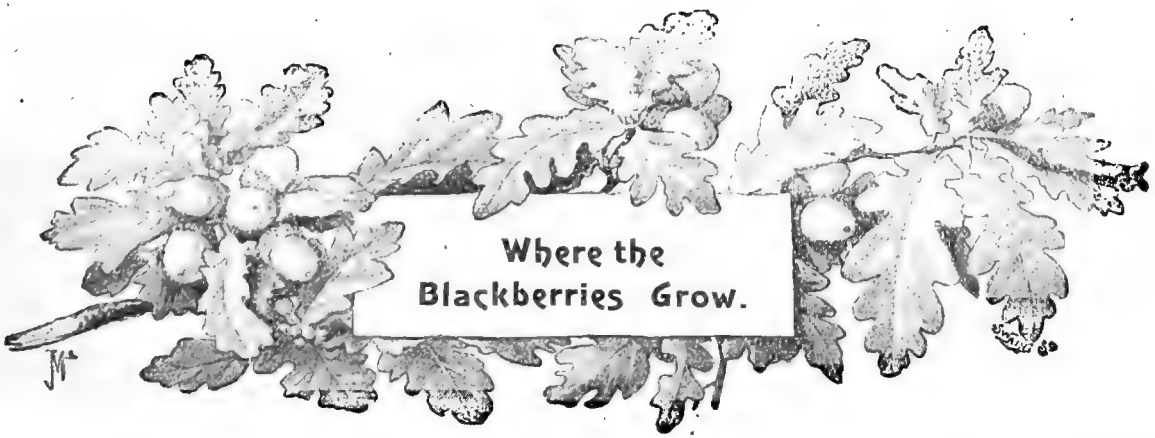
Taking a clean sheet of paper he wrote again, and the words that he wrote cleared, in this world, at least, the dead man's name of all stain of the crime of which he had been accused.

"I alone," he wrote, "stole the money from the Bank."

It was a masterly confession from beginning to end He thought long and carefully over it, so that it would leave no doubt in the minds of those who read.

Then, taking his hat, he stole out into the street.

Many people noticed that night a hollow-eyed, sad-looking man, standing near one of the parapets of the bridge that crossed the river.



THE girl stands looking at the picture; the man who painted it stands looking at the girl. What a sweet face it is, so girlish, so untouched by the sorrows and passions of life! The look of pleased admiration in the soft eyes gives him an odd sensation of pleasure. He is glad that his work pleases her.

The girl is presently joined by a tall, graceful woman. Shirley gives a slight start.

"Eleanor!" he murmurs.

"Oh, mamma," the girl is saying, "isn't this a sweet picture? I like it better than anything I have seen here."

Some of the faint, delicate colour fades out of Eleanor Seaton's beautiful, tired face as she looks at the canvas that has aroused her daughter's enthusiasm.

"Yes," she murmurs mechanically, "it is a beautiful picture."

And then with hands which are a little tremulous, she opens her catalogue and seeks the number of her picture.

"'Where the Blackberries Grow—John Shirley.' I was sure of it," she murmurs, and looks again at the picture.

A field in which there are quantities of wild flowers, tall, beautifully coloured grasses, and bushes laden with ripe berries. In the midst of the blackberry bushes stand a boy and girl. The former is busily picking berries, and his face is averted; the latter is a charming little figure in a calico slip and a small, pink sun-bonnet pushed back from a fair baby face, the pouting lips deeply stained with blackberry juice. A mass of gold coloured curls falls over the childish brow.

A fellow artist has joined Shirley.

"Mrs. Seaton and her daughter appear to be admiring your picture, Shirley," he says. "Come, let me introduce you. Mrs. Seaton is a charming woman."

"And the young girl is her daughter?" says Shirley, as they move away.

"Yes, but she will never be the lovely woman that her mother is," is the reply, and Shirley smiles.

Some hours later Mrs. Seaton sits before her dressing-room fire. There is an unusual quickening of her languid pulse. In the leaping heart of the fire she sees mirrored all the years since she and Shirley gathered blackberries in the acre field, one summer day long ago. How faithfully he had reproduced the scene in his painting!

The picture in the fire shifts a little; still the fields with its wild flowers and its laden bushes, but a young

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man and maiden replace the boy and baby girl. Back from the long past there comes to Eleanor Seaton the ecstasy of that unforgotten day.

But the picture has faded from the fire, and another replaces it. A wedding party: the bride, young and fair of face, and white as her bridal robes; and the bridegroom—not the boyish young lover, but a middle-aged, cynical looking man. Her youth and her innocence had caught his fancy; and she had bartered herself for his gold; sacrificed truth and, as she but too soon realised, happiness also. But she had soon learned the lesson many a woman had learned before her—to hide her aching heart beneath a smiling face. Girlhood, happiness—her own hand had slain them. With the coming of her child something like peace had crept into her heart.

Then Seaton died, and she was once more free. Of her young lover she heard nothing. She knew that he had left the old farm, that he had gone abroad to study art. Now, after all these years, they met again. The farmer's son had become a well-known artist. A grey-haired man replaced the lover of her youth.

The pictures of the past have died in the leaping flames. Other scenes are mirrored there, and hope paints them.

"What? Not dressed yet!" exclaimed a fresh, girlish voice. "Have you forgotten that Mr. Shirley and Mr. Halwell are coming to dinner, mamma?"

With dreamy eyes Eleanor Seaton turns and smiles up into the fair face of her young daughter. The girl wears a simple white gown. She is very girlish and very sweet.

"Oh, mamma! How lovely you are!" Ray exclaims, later, as her mother enters the drawing-room in a beautiful rose pink gown which is exceedingly becoming to her dazzlingly fair skin and pale gold hair. And Eleanor Seaton's cheeks softly flush and her eyes grow radiant. She is glad for the first time in many years that she is beautiful.

How swiftly the days and the weeks and the months glide by after that night! Shirley is a frequent visitor at the home of Mrs. Seaton. Then, when the summer comes, Eleanor Seaton has a fancy to visit the old farm.

The artist follows her and her daughter. One evening Eleanor stands at the old farm-house door. The air is full of the perfume of roses. The sky is crimson and gold. The woman's face is beautiful with the soft radiance of a love dream.

Then Ray comes towards her through the roses. The girl's face is flushed, her eyes droop. She moves slowly to her mother's side.

"Where have you been, dear?" the latter asks, wondering a little at the change in the girl's face.

"To the blackberry field," the girl replies. "I went with Mr. Shirley; he wished to show me the scene of his painting. Oh, mother," and the girl's arms go about her mother's neck, "he loves me—can you imagine it? He wants me for his wife, and I—I am so happy."

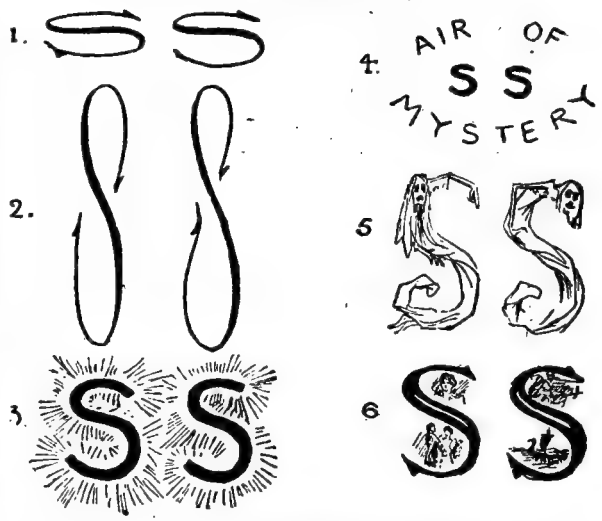
There is a silence for some moments. Then Eleanor Seaton lifts the sweet face from her breast, and presses her lips to her daughter's flushed cheek.

"I am very glad, dear, that you are happy," she murmurs.

The sunset glow has faded from the sky, leaving it pale and cold and grey. Eleanor shivers in the warm, perfumed air. Her eyes, to which all the old weariness has returned, look past the brown head of the girl towards the field "where the blackberries grow."

EMMA HOWARD WIGHT.

POST-CARD COMPETITION, No. 17.



The pairs of letters shown above indicate by their formation the character of the short stories found in *S.S.* For example, **S S** would signify "Thick Short Stories." A guinea is offered to the reader who first sends to these offices a post-card containing the solution of this puzzle. Readers should put the numbers in tabular order, and the sort of story against each, *commencing with number six*, and going backwards. Another guinea will be sent to the reader living a greater distance than 100 miles from London under the same conditions. *Post-cards only, please.*

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION, No. 16.

MR. C. F. ADAMS, of 9, Fitzalan Street, Kennington Road, S.E., secures the London guinea this week; while the provincial guinea is divided between Miss B. Thorn, 19, Furnace Lane, Aston, Birmingham, and Mr. A. Clayton, 226, Wheeler Street, Aston, Birmingham.

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION, No. 14.

£5 has been sent to Mr. H. H. Harrod, 7, Dingwall Avenue, Croydon, S.E., who was the only competitor who succeeded in correctly solving this jumbled story. Attempts forwarded by the following readers contained only one mistake, and a sovereign each goes to Mr. H. P. Wright, 72, Evelina Road, Nunhead, S.E.; Miss Rosina Adams, 2, Ironfield Lane, Stonehaven, N.B.; Mr. W. Spencer, 8, Bettridge Road, Hurlingham; Mr. E. Beardsley, 31, Ponsonby Place, Westminster; and Mr. E. J. Milner, 26, Rosebank Crescent, Leeds.

KEY.

22	5	62	99	39	90	69	83	85
1	37	19	97	31	64	17	27	100
30	10	42	41	43	93	88	79	52
81	21	54	20	2	75	24	32	70
92	96	98	101	45	60	72	102	66
4	29	68	77	8	89	50	57	95
84	36	23	63	25	74	55	73	87
35	82	18	38	34	33	51	104	65
14	103	86	47	44	48	53	7	
94	80	40	26	12	59	78	61	
9	71	11	46	28	58	91	56	
13	67	16	15	3	49	6	76	

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THE RETURN OF THE TERROR.

THE people who live in Jenkins' Rents are about as poor as they well can be; but the establishment at the corner, which ministers to their necessities in the way of liquid refreshment, boasts every modern improvement. There are little compartments all round the bar, divided off by mahogany partitions, each compartment with a swing door of its own, and its particular name in white letters on stained glass.

A man with close-cropped hair stood outside, one afternoon, with an expression of lost bewilderment on his by no means handsome countenance. He looked at the swing doors one by one, as if in doubt which to enter, and finally pushed his way into one which, by putting itself at the end of the public-house front, had taken an air of semi-privacy.

He found himself alone in the compartment, with a glimpse of other customers across the bar, in their pens at the other side, and waited till a frizzy-headed damsel came round to his part of the counter. She listened with a weary expression for his order, economising her animation for more showy customers.

The visitor cleared his throat.

"Is old Blazer in?" he asked, leaning forward, with his elbow on the mahogany counter; and the girl opened her eyes.

"Who?"

"Old Blazer, the boss?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know who you mean. Our proprietor's name's Smith."

The barmaid turned away as she spoke to serve threepennyworth of rum to a lady with a hoarse voice, at the other side of the bar; and the man who had asked the question was preparing slowly to leave the place, when a shrill voice came from the next compartment:

"Blazer's been dead this five year. Died suddent of 'perplexy, and his wife sold the business to these ere people."

The stranger grunted an acknowledgment and cleared his throat again.

"D' yer happen to know what's become of a young person as used to live in the Rents 'ere, o' the name o' Bet Pawkins?" he asked, addressing the query to the mahogany wall which divided him from his unseen informant.

There was no immediate answer; but peering round the end of the partition by the counter came the white, wrinkled face of an old woman. She stared through bleared eyes at the stranger for a minute or two, and then burst into a cackling laugh.

"Why, bless us!" she cried, "it's Jim the Terror come back. How long 'ave yer been out, Jim?"

"Came out to-day," said Jim, his voice sounding not very friendly. "Where's Bet?"

The hag cackled again, wrinkling her hideous old face into new furrows.

"Oh! Bet's bin gone long ago. She won't have nothin' to do with yer now."

Necks were being craned and heads stretched round partitions. A general interest was awakened among the customers in the story which was being unfolded before them.

A man who had heard the old hag's cry of recognition hurried round to Jim the Terror's compartment to greet an old friend; but the man had no eyes for him. He was looking with a stern, set face into the bleared eyes of his informant.

"What d'ye mean?" he asked hoarsely. "Where d'ye reckon my Bet's gone to?"

"Oh! I don't know. She went off with a quarryman, and married him, about six months after you were nabbed. Lawks! that's seven year ago—ain't it? You got a 'tenner.' I suppose you're out on ticket?"

The man had been staring at her all the while she spoke. Now he answered excitedly, catching at the bony hand which she stretched at him.

"Now I remember yer, old Mother Guzzlefoot, and I knew yer for the worst liar in Jenkins' Rents. But I'll teach yer not to tell lies about my Bet!"

He shook his fist in her face,

"S'elp me, it's no lie!" cried the old woman with energy, as she shrank back behind the partition. "Betty Pawkins has married a respectable man from up North, who knew her before she came to London, or took up with you!"

There was a ring of indignant sincerity in her voice, and the Terror's face turned a queer yellow-white.

"Where did she go to with him?" he asked.

"Back to where she lived when she was a gal, if yer know where that is."

The man returned no thanks for the information; but turned to go, jostling roughly aside the man who had come round to renew an old friendship. At the door he paused, and shouted over the partition to the old woman:

"Well, if you meet Betty Pawkins before I do, which ain't likely, you can tell her I am out of quod, and I'll never rest till I'm even with her for forgetting me. D'ye hear?"

He struck open the swing-doors as he finished, and stamped out into the street with a look on his face which explained the nickname they had given him in Jenkins' Rents—Jim the Terror.

* * * * *

Nearly two weeks after Jim the Terror's return from

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gaol, a woman was kneeling at the edge of a stone-quarry in Yorkshire, looking down the precipitous side.

From behind a man approached her stealthily. He was dusty and travel-stained, but there was no sign of weariness in the step with which he crept forward. His face was rigid and pale through his brownness; his eyes gleamed. The moment had arrived for which he had come on foot all the way from London. All the way his heart had been consumed by the one desire for revenge, now the desire was about to be satisfied.

For the man creeping forward was Jim the Terror, of Jenkins' Rents, and the woman was Betty Pawkins, who had given him up, as soon as he was safely in prison, to marry another man. All those years in gaol he had looked forward to seeing Betty when he came out; and to find that she had deserted him turned in one moment all his eagerness into a passion for revenge.

He had travelled to her native place on foot to satisfy it; he had inquired in the village, and following the direction given him, had come upon her kneeling at the very edge of the quarry. It was as if Fortune had tried to make matters as easy as possible for him. He had but to approach her carefully, seize her arms, while he explained what he was going to do, and then throw her down without anybody being the wiser. It was almost too easy; but he had no intention of losing the chance.

He was close upon her, when suddenly the woman gave a scream. But she did not turn her face, and it was quite clear that she was not aware of the Terror's presence.

Why did she scream? Jim's curiosity was aroused, and he crept to the edge to look down, without touching her.

Below him, half-way down the almost precipitious side of the quarry, a little fellow of five or six, who had evidently slipped from where the woman was standing, hung desperately to a jutting-out block of stone. Below him was a sheer descent of thirty feet, and it seemed as though the child's little strength must soon be exhausted, and he fall and be killed.

Jim the Terror took in the position at a glance. A foot above the boy's head was a narrow ledge on which the boy could rest in safety till help arrived, if he could but reach it. But it was quite impossible for him to reach it by himself; it would be easier for Jim to get to it, sliding down the steep rock, and helping himself on his way by means of jutting edges.

There must have been a soft place somewhere in his heart for children, for the sight of the lad's danger took all thought of his revenge quite out of his mind.

Without even a look at the woman whom he had been about to kill, he crawled over the edge of the precipice, and began to descend carefully.

In less than five minutes he was on the ledge, which was almost a foot and a half wide, and lying full length on it had reached down and grasped the just relaxing arm of the youngster. In another minute the boy was sitting on the ledge at his side. Then, for the first time, he looked up into the strained white face of the woman above him.

"Run and fetch some men and a rope," he shouted; and the woman disappeared.

The boy seemed to realise his danger only when he heard the words, and he began to whimper.

Jim soothed him roughly.

"None of that, you young imp!" he said. "You're all right now. We've only got to wait till they bring us a rope."

The boy stared at him.

"Where's mother gone?" he whimpered.

"Who?"

"Mother—she's gone away. Where has she gone?"

Jim did not reply; but after a little pause, he said:

"Oh! that's yer mother, is it?"

"Yes."

The youngster stared at him with wide-open eyes.

"And what's your name?"

"Charlie."

"Well, Charlie, how would you like to lose yer mother—eh?—and never see her again?"

The boy began to whimper again, and there was another silence while they sat side by side on the narrow ledge of the rock. Then Jim the Terror went on with his catechism.

"Nice home have you got—eh?"

Charlie nodded.

"Got a good father?"

Another nod.

"Come, speak out," said the man; and as he went on talking, the youngster found his tongue and prattled away merrily, looking up with a smile every now and then into the rough face bent over him. "Does your mother ever talk about London, and what she used to do there?" Jim asked; and little Charlie, who was growing cheerful again under this examination, answered readily:

"Oh, yes; she talks about big London sometimes," he said with his childish lisp. "But not often; and she looks so sad when she does. She used to live there, and was so poor, she hadn't no bread even; and if daddy hadn't found her, and brought her home with him, she would have died with having nothing to eat. Wasn't it awful?"

He looked at his big companion for a reply, and this time Jim could only imitate him and nod.

The child ran on, telling the story, no doubt, word for word as he had heard it.

"And wasn't it kind of daddy to go all the way to London to find mother, and to save her when she was starving?"

He waited for an answer, and again the Terror nodded.

It was quite a relief to him after this questioning to hear voices and find that the help he had sent the woman for was come. There were two men looking over the edge of the quarry, and letting down a rope. He tied it round the boy first.

"You'd better let it down, and I'll steady it!" he shouted.

It was easy enough to get out of the quarry at the other side, once a person was safe at the bottom of it. In less than ten minutes Jim and Charlie were together on firm ground, walking hand in hand towards the quarry opening. They reached it before the people from the top could do so. The Terror lifted the boy in his arms then, and rather shamefacedly gave him a hug.

"Good-bye, old man," he said hoarsely. "Yer mother'll be here in a minute for you."

But the boy hung on to his hand, unwilling to let him go.

"Won't you come home to tea? Mother would be ever so glad!" he said.

Jim shook himself free, however, and answered, with a grin smile:

"I don't think she would, youngster. No, I'll go my way, and let yer mother go hers;" and the next moment he disappeared round a projecting rock, as the child's mother came in sight. H. F.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SOCIAL STAB.

"HERE, what the devil!" began Braetoun savagely. Then, crushing down the ignoble thought: "Ah, that pain again. Talking to her," he continued, with a feeble little laugh, "about me?"

"Perhaps so, my lord," said the woman drily. "Shall I stay here at the window?"

"Eh? No, of course not. Yes, stay and tell me. Is he still talking to her?"

"Yes, my lord, very impressively."

"Humph! Pills and potions, and all that confounded stuff. Why the deuce doesn't he go? I hate all this underhanded business of talking about a man behind his back."

The nurse sighed.

"Here, what the deuce do you mean by pumping out sighs like that?"

"Did I sigh, my lord?"

"Yes, you did sigh, my lady. What about? Because the doctor's gone?"

"Oh, my lord!"

"Not in love with him, are you?"

"Oh, my lord, you shouldn't speak to me like that."

"I shall speak as I like. I believe you are. You good-looking, dark-eyed women are not above taking a fancy to people. Anything between you two?"

"Oh, my lord, for shame!"

"Oh, my lady, for shame," said Braetoun mockingly. "It is that, isn't it? That's why you sighed."

"I sighed because I was sorry for your lordship, that was all."

"Gammon! I know better."

"Indeed, my lord, you are wrong."

"Now, then, out with the truth. I've watched you, my lady. You are a bit taken with him, eh? You like him just a little, eh?"

"I like him very much as a medical man, my lord, but in no other way."

"Don't believe you. Here, hasn't that brougham gone? I didn't hear the wheels."

"No, my lord. Doctor Murray is still talking to her ladyship."

"What about?" cried Braetoun impatiently. "What can they have to say?"

The nurse tightened her lips and was silent, while Braetoun fidgeted about on the couch.

"Gone?" he said at last.

"No, my lord; they are still talking."

"Look here; he's giving her all kinds of instructions, and I won't have her interfere. You are to see to everything I require, and I will not have matters taken out of your hands. You hear me?"

"Yes, my lord, you may depend upon my doing my duty."

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"Ah, at last. Tell her not to disturb me. I think I shall have a nap."

"That was not Dr. Murray's carriage, my lord, but another one passing."

"But they are not talking still at the carriage door?"

"Yes, my lord, but Dr. Murray is saying good-bye now. He has again taken her ladyship's hand."

"Humph! He didn't take mine," muttered Braetoun "Hang him! I say," he continued, with all the childish petulance of one still weak from a long illness, "how long is he going to keep her talking there?"

The nurse drew a long, deep breath, and Braetoun turned to her angrily.

"Look here! what the deuce is the matter with you?—why do you keep on sighing like that?"

"I—I beg your pardon, my lord," faltered the woman.

"Don't beg my pardon: don't do it," he cried. "Well, is he gone?"

"No, my lord."

"D——n!"

"But he is moving away now, my lord. No; it was for the footman to open the door, and he is helping her ladyship to alight."

"Humph! Deuced civil and polite. Better be off to his patients. Ah, there's the bell. Somebody ought to have been at the door."

The nurse came away from the window and walked softly to the fireplace, took a bottle of scent from the mantelpiece, and sprinkled a little about the couch.

"Don't do that," he cried irritably.

"It will help to calm you, my lord, for your sleep. You are tired now."

"No, I'm not. Not in the least. And do stand still. How am I to hear my wife come upstairs?"

She drew back, and he lay listening for some little time, and then with his face twitching he cried:

"Why, she can't have come in. Go to the window and look."

"I beg your pardon, my lord. I heard her ladyship come in and go upstairs."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so? But, go upstairs without coming in here first? Nonsense! Open that door."

The nurse obeyed, and the convalescent lay listening till footsteps were heard overheard.

"Her ladyship has gone up to take off her things, I think, my lord."

"Confound what you think! There, shut that door. That's better. But don't look at me in that way. What's the matter? I don't look worse, do I?"

"Your lordship looks very careworn and troubled," said the woman in a low, sympathetic voice. "Pray let me bathe your forehead with a little of this scent."

"Then I do look worse," he cried, with a sudden catching

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of the breath; and he made a snatch at the hand which held the scent-bottle.

"No, no, no, my lord. Don't think that," she said in a pitying way. "Indeed, you only look troubled," and she sighed again.

"Look here," he said angrily. "You're thinking something. You're keeping something back. What is it?"

"Don't, don't pinch my arm like that, my lord, you hurt me."

"Curse you! and you're hurting me. Look here, I can read you. You're keeping something back, I tell you; what is it? You were sighing just now. What was that about?"

"Oh, nothing, my lord—only, perhaps, because I was sorry for you."

"Then you think I'm worse?"

"Indeed, indeed. I don't, my lord. Pray loose my arm."

"Then what is it? Curse you! Will you speak?"

"I musn't—I daren't, my lord."

"And I say you shall. Do you hear me? I say you shall."

"Oh, my lord, my lord," cried the woman in a frightened whisper, "you must not, indeed, you must not give way to passion like this. It is so bad for you—it is, indeed."

"Then speak out, and tell me what you were thinking, or, curse you, I'll have a fit."

"I dare not, indeed, I dare not," she whispered. "I must not tell you."

"You shall," he cried, holding her now with both hands, while she made a feeble show of trying to get away. "Will you speak?"

"Indeed, indeed, I dare not, my lord," she sobbed now. "It is nothing—only a fancy of mine. I mustn't tell you. Don't, pray, force it from me, because I know it's wrong, and you'll have me turned out of the house in disgrace for saying it."

"Whether I do or no, you shall speak," he cried. "Now then, what was it?"

She sank upon her knees by the couch and held up her clasped hands as he still held her.

"Don't, pray don't make me speak, my lord. It's cruel to me. It was only a wicked thought or two that came into my head."

"What was it?" he growled fiercely.

"Must—must I speak?"

"Yes, and at once. Curse you, I'll half kill you if you don't."

"But you'll drive me away for saying it, and I can't afford to make enemies, my lord."

"Out with it," he cried, as he gripped her as hard as his weakness would allow. "Now."

"It—it was only that—that I thought—oh, pray, pray don't make me say it, my lord."

"Speak out, curse you, you jade!"

"That—that her ladyship oughtn't—oughtn't to talk so much—to Doctor Murray, and you lying ill and helpless."

"You—you thought that?" he said fiercely.

"Ye—yes, my lord. I couldn't help it. I often felt so—in the long, dark nights when you were insensible. It was very wicked of me, but it was when I was extra tired, perhaps, and felt so sorry for you to be lying there."

He let her arms go free, and lay back gazing at her with a peculiar, stony aspect.

"There—there," she sobbed, as she wiped her eyes. "You made me say it, my lord, and now you're going to punish me."

"Hold your tongue," he said. "Get up. No, don't go away. Sit down in that chair."

She obeyed, and seemed to be trembling.

"You noticed that, did you?" he said in a husky whisper.

"Yes, my lord," she faltered.

"And a good deal more?"

"Oh, don't, pray don't make me say anything else," she whispered.

"I'll make you say everything I wish," he snarled. "Now then, out with it. I want to know the whole truth. Now tell me everything you saw."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Emsworth Makes Mischief.

"Ah, Mr. Emsworth!" said Murray, rising, as Rancer showed in the bearer of that name one morning, "I'm very glad to see you."

"Don't seem like it," said Emsworth surlily. "Haven't been near me for over a month. But it's the old story: a rich man has no friends."

Murray smiled sadly.

"I was in hopes that though rich men have no friends, this was meant as a friendly visit—but I see you are ill."

"D—n bad, my dear boy. Don't take any notice of my surly words, only you should have come to see me. But there, I know you've too many *miserables* to attend to as it is. Well, how are you?"

Murray laughed pleasantly.

"Pretty well worked to death, sir. But let's hear how you are, and see what I can do?"

"Oh, you can't do anything. It isn't a case for pills, unless it's blue pills made of lead instead of quicksilver. My complaint's brain, and a local application of that kind is the only thing that would put me right."

"Indeed! and what about your daughter?"

"Hah! There you have me on the hip," said Emsworth with a weary sigh. "But I often wonder why I have passed a life of slavery to make money, only to find that the position I've won is all thorns. Mustn't make hers worse, though, poor child. I dare say I shall get some rest in the next world, for I'm having plenty of punishment for my sins in this. But don't quite cut me. Come and see me a bit more. You always do me good; you do, indeed."

"Well, I will try and be more sociable. It is not out of unkindness or a wish to be neglectful."

"Oh, I know that," said Emsworth, fidgeting about in his chair; and Murray waited with a strange sensation of misery troubling him, knowing full well as he did that Emsworth must have some bad news to communicate—news which would affect him as much as its bearer. At last it came.

"Seen the Braetouns lately?"

"Yes. I have been there twice during the past week. Braetoun sent for me. Return of his old complaint."

"His nature's all unscrewed," cried Emsworth passionately, and he brought his fist down heavily upon the table. "There's no fairness in it all. Here's a fine, healthy fellow in one case, with eight or nine young children and a wife, gets cut off, and those he has to leave behind him, without a shilling; and on the other side, men like Braetoun, a mere shadow of a man, to go on living, injuring everyone about him. By George, what a blessing it would be if he would only die!"

The old man was silent, and the pause grew painful.

Murray broke the silence by saying the words that came uppermost, but repented speaking the next moment.

"Have you seen Lady Braetoun lately?"

"No; he comes between us like a blight. I can't go near them, because if I do it's a misery. I see things which make me boil over, and then, poor child, she takes his part. She thinks me hard and harsh, and I'm better away."

The stream had begun to run now, and Emsworth went on as if it was an intense relief to take someone into his confidence.

"It's of no use to be mealy mouthed; he's a scoundrel, a heartless scoundrel. Anyone would have thought, after the way in which Olive forgave him, and nursed him through his long illness, he would have turned over a new leaf. She behaved like an angel to him, and in return he tramples upon her best feelings, and I believe he would throw her over altogether, if it was not for the hope of getting hold

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of my money when I die. But he shan't, not a penny. I'll —I'll leave it to you."

"For Heaven's sake, don't," cried Murray. "I thought you wished to call me your friend."

"Well," said the old man, staring, "can't one leave a friend a few thousand?"

"Not this one," said Murray, smiling. "I have a good income, sir, so long as I work, and work is my greatest relief. Don't do anything to make me feel that I can be idle."

"I shall do as I like with my own," said Emsworth sulkily.

"Do so, by all means, but please don't mention money to me again."

"Very well. Then I'll build a church, or endow a hospital. I can't go and spend it, for I've lost all taste for enjoyment of any kind. Oh, it's maddening. He has thrown off every feeling of shame or compunction now, and carries it all off openly. He's hardly ever at home — always at Brompton or his place in Surrey with that cursed Delilah. It all began again after that unlucky journey from Brighton. I've done everything I could to stop it—bribery and corruption—ah, it didn't want any of the last. Plenty of that, eh? But it is no good. I give you my word of honour that I've been and seen the girl—there. I called her a Delilah—I beg her pardon. Poor little wench! I don't believe there's anything more in her than a genuine liking for that scoundrel. I've appealed to her and her old aunt over and over again. I've offered them any amount they liked to name to go right away. The aunt is always on my side, and told me that if I'd allow her niece a hundred a year she should go right away, and never see Braetoun again. So I've had a quiet, kind, fatherly talk with the little thing.

"I never said a bullying, unkind word, but regularly appealed to her, telling her about what I felt for my child, and pointing out the cruelty of the position. Then I thought I'd got her, for she seems a tender-hearted little thing, and she began to cry. I told her what her aunt had said, and that I thought a hundred a year was too little. So I would allow her two hundred and fifty a year, and give her at once a set of handsome diamonds. But I might as well have offered her nothing, for she only shook her head. Then I doubled it, and she said, 'Don't ask me, sir; I can't, I can't.'"

Murray sat with his head resting on his hand, listening, his eyes half closed, and Emsworth went on.

"I went away in a rage, but within a week I was back, for I'd been to Chester Square and seen the poor, white face and strained eyes there, and I felt that I must make any sacrifice for her sake. So, right or wrong, I went back, and the little thing—by George, Murray, she'd have made a good woman if she'd come into the world differently—she met me with a little, sad smile, and as soon as we were sitting down together she began at me, with the tears running: 'It's of no use, Mr. Emsworth,' she said, 'I can't, I can't.' 'Wait a moment, my dear,' I said, 'and hear what I've got to say'; and, old fool as I am, I offered her a thousand a year—and I'd have paid it to secure Olive's happiness. But as soon as the girl heard it she laughed, and her eyes seemed to sparkle through her tears. 'I don't want money, Mr. Emsworth,' she said. 'I loved him, and he loved me, before he ever saw you and yours, and I wouldn't give him up for millions.' There, I don't care, law or no law, Murray, if I could only get her to consent, I'd take my girl off to Africa, and Braetoun should never see her again. But she wouldn't listen to me, poor child, and my hands are tied. I did say something to her one day, and there was such a look of horror in her eyes that I shall never dare to speak so to her again."

Emsworth took out his handkerchief to wipe his face, and sat gazing at Murray's wrinkled brow the while.

"Then there's this miserable horse-racing, too. The devil always seems to do his best for the greatest scoundrels. He has been having a regular run of luck lately with that mare of his, Bella Donna. Hah! Poison, and no mistake! But it's found him in funds, and made him a bit independent, so he hasn't sent my poor girl begging to me."

The old man stopped short, and then laughed in a curious manner.

"I was laughing at the queer way in which things turn out. Remember my bringing Olive here? Hah! That was a nice piece of advice of yours, my boy, to take her on that voyage. Pretty day's work, too, to send that scoundrel with us."

"For Heaven's sake, don't reproach me with that," cried Murray, in so agonised a tone of voice that the old man was startled.

"Oh, no, I don't reproach you, my lad," he said, laying his hand upon the other's shoulder. "We can't see what's going to happen. You gave me good advice, and there's no fighting against fate. But it was a sad business for all of us, and I know you've suffered as much as I."

"Heaven knows I have," said Murray in a hollow voice which startled Emsworth.

"Thank you, my lad, thank you," said the old man, taking his hand. "I know you have; I know you have. There isn't a doctor in London who could have done me so much good as you have this morning. It's too bad of me to come pouring out my woes to you, but you've been a good fellow to me, Murray, and I'm not blind. I've seen for long enough the tender, brotherly feeling you've felt towards my child. Braetoun was your old school-fellow and patient, but you wouldn't have given up your time and worked for him as you did over his accident if it hadn't been for my poor darling. Do you know what she says?"

Murray raised his eyes and looked at the speaker in a startled way.

"She says she is sure that Braetoun would have died again and again if it hadn't been for you. But there, I'm wasting your time, and I'll go. God bless you, my dear boy. Come and dine with me to-night."

Murray shook his head.

"Well, to-morrow, then?"

"Don't press me, Mr. Emsworth. I'll come and see you soon. There, I can promise no more."

"Always welcome," said the old man, shaking hands warmly; and when he was gone the Doctor sat gazing straight before him at vacancy, pondering on his visitor's words respecting his brotherly affection for Olive.

"Was he sincere?" he thought, "or does he read me through and through?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Murray Goes Mad.

But it's a long lane that has no turning. Braetoun's mare had been making a fortune for him, and Vinniss, who saved his winnings, grew more independent and insulting to his employer, who was dependent, for he spent his. Sam, the weedy son's riding, had carried all before it, and presuming upon his run of success, Braetoun determined upon a grand *coup*, made his stroke, and, to use his own expression, "came a cropper."

That night he went home looking ghastly, and literally raged against his wife for some trivial little omission, swore at her, and told her she was the curse of his life. Then as Olive was feeling that her misery was greater than she could bear, her reviler suddenly broke down, staggered, and would have fallen but for her willing arms guiding him into a lounge.

Then the imploring message reached Murray once more, and at an unlucky time, for in spite of all self-control, his passion had broken away after a visit to Eaton Place, where he had heard from Emsworth what had happened.

He was walking up and down his room after trying to calm himself for the visit by taking a dose of the drug he used, but it had lost its old effect.

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He shuddered, and stood gazing blankly before him, not daring to repeat in words what it might mean.

But he was himself again directly.

Rancer had tapped and entered, to say a cab was at the door, and Murray looked calm and stern enough as his servant helped him on with his coat, and he stepped into the vehicle to have himself driven swiftly to Chester Square.

"Is that Doctor Murray?" cried a voice, as he went upstairs; and there stood Olive, looking, as he thought, more beautiful than ever, with her mild, appealing eyes gazing at him as the one friend who could bring her help, and a thrill ran through him as she caught his hands in hers, and cried, with a sob of relief:

"I thought you so long. He is worse than ever—one of those terrible fits. Pray—pray come."

She was quite right. Braetoun was worse than ever. He had, in spite of endless warnings that he must be very cautious in the use of stimulants, flown to brandy, and then to the French liqueur, as soon as he knew the extent of his losses, and the result has been shown.

Then followed the old miserable business of the fight with the wild delirium, which finally gave way to Murray's remedy and skill, and Braetoun sank into a heavy stupor, looking more dead than alive.

They were alone in the sick man's room, and the house was very still, for the clock had just struck three, and the weary servants, no longer alarmed by these attacks, had gone to rest. Olive, who, from old experience, had been able to read the changes which had taken place, knew that the crisis had passed, and sank upon her knees by the bed, while Murray, who all through the weary hours had been maddened by her presence, the touch of her hands, and the intoxicating perfume of her hair, as she helped him to calm the delirious man, and at times even hold him down, stood watching her, till she rose with a faint smile trembling on her lip.

"I can't speak to you now," she said. "Wait a little. Go down to the drawing-room. You are quite exhausted. There is a tray there. The servants will have taken one up. Please go down."

"And you?" he said in a whisper. "You are utterly worn out. You must come down, too."

"No, no; he must not be left," she cried appealingly.

"Yes; he will sleep now for hours. The danger is past, and he will not hurt. You must rest now."

"I could not sleep, indeed, and I can rest here."

"Then I must fetch you some refreshment. You are paler than ever, and look ready to faint."

"I cannot have you waiting on me," she replied, with a faint smile. "I will come down. But are you sure that he can be left?"

"You know now as well as I," he said quietly. "We have gone through all this wretched business before."

"Yes," she said, with a weary sigh, and laying her hand upon his arm they passed out of the chamber together, and down the silent staircase into the dim, calm, and peaceful drawing-room, where, upon a side table, there stood tea, coffee, spirits, and a kettle just simmering over a gas jet.

Olive hurried to the table as soon as the door closed behind them, turned up the gas, and proceeded to make tea, while Murray took a turn up and down the dimly lighted room, and then threw himself into a chair, turning his face towards the shade, but listening intently to every movement she made, the click of the china, and the rustle of her dress.

Then he shivered, for the rustle of the silk came closer, and he looked up with a start, to find that she was bending over him.

"How tired and worn you look, Doctor! The tea will be ready in a minute," she said gently. "I could not speak upstairs; I should have broken down and cried like a child. I can tell you now—what I wanted to say—that—that——"

In spite of her words the tears gushed to her eyes, brimmed over, she burst into a passionate fit of sobbing, and covered her face with her hands, as Murray sprang to his feet and caught her in his arms.

"Don't, for God's sake, don't give way like that," he cried wildly. "I cannot bear to see you suffer. It is too horrible."

For a moment she did not shrink, but went on sobbing hysterically. Then with a start of surprise, as he pressed her closer to his breast, she drew back, but he retained her hands.

"Don't shrink from me," he whispered; and the words which had been kept back so long came rapidly and full of passion. "You don't know, you cannot tell all I have suffered for your sake."

"Yes, I know, I know," she said in a startled way, but as if not quite realising, not willing to believe herself. "You have been so patient, so kind. You have saved his life again and again. We can never thank you enough. But come, now you need rest and refreshment."

"Saved his life!" he said wildly; "and for what? Do you think I am blind and deaf to everything? There have been hours when in my misery and despair I have been ready to end my own. Olive, from the first time we met I have loved you with all a strong man s first passionate love. I have gone through a year of madness, realising first how it was impossible that you could listen to me, then ready to rejoice that you were going to be happy in the love of the man you chose, and gradually awakening to the fact that I had stood by and seen you brought to misery, wretchedness and despair. No, no, don't, in Heaven's name!" he cried angrily, as with a quick movement he drew her tightly, more tightly to his breast, while she pressed her hands against his shoulder and forced herself away, trembling, scared, and horrified at his declaration, and with her eyes wildly dilated as she gazed in his, but, utterly helpless as she felt her position, unable to utter a word.

"I cannot, it is impossible to tell you all I have gone through in my ever-growing love. I, who would have died to spare you pain, forced to be a witness of your misery and unhappiness, till I have reviled myself in being as it were a partner in your husband's guilt. You struggle, you thrust me from you, but you cannot be so cruel; you cannot—you who are so lonely and despairing, cast from you a love that can know no end, for I live, I breathe, only for you, and if, now I can hold back no longer, you cast me off, there is but one release from my misery, and that is death."

"Doctor!" she panted at last.

"No; your slave."

"Doctor—Doctor Murray," she cried wildly, in her vain struggle to escape. "For Heaven's sake! You must be mad!"

(To be continued.)

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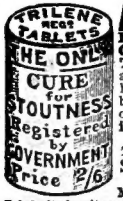

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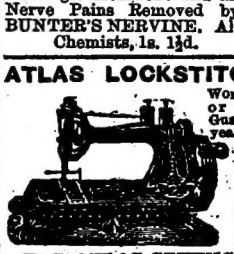

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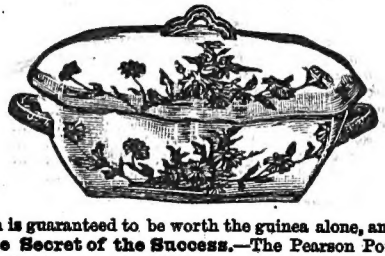

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9ft. by	10½ft.	... ...	8/6		12ft. by	15ft.	... ...	15/9
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